The HONOURABLE JIM

BARONESS ORCZY

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By Baroness Orczy

Author of

"The Triumph of the Scarlet Pimpernel," "The First Sir Percy," "His Majesty's Well-Beloved," "The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel," etc.

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THE HONOURABLE JIM
— B —
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To

LORD *and* LADY SAYE AND SELE

I dedicate this faithful chronicle of beautiful Broughton Castle and of the true adventures of their romantic ancestor.

EMMUSKA ORCZY

CONTENTS

PAGE

Foreword 11

BOOK I: *The Night Before the Storm*

CHAPTER

I A FAMILY AFFAIR 17

II THE WEDDING DAY 21

BOOK II: *The Storm*

I THE ROLL OF THUNDER 47

II CHANCE EAVESDROPPING 63

III THE SPY 88

IV A DEBT OF HONOUR 96

V NASEBY 116

VI THOU SHALT NOT KILL 127

BOOK III: *The Aftermath*

I THE SPELL OF BROUGHTON 139

II BLOOD MONEY 150

III MEMORIES 167

IV THE BARGAIN 178

V THE CATACLYSM 191

BOOK III: *The Aftermath* [Continued]

CHAPTER		PAGE
VI	SUNSET	200
VII	LOOKING MY LOVE	208
VIII	THE INEVITABLE	227
IX	THE SCARRED HAND	243
X	HEART O' MINE	251
XI	A LIFE FOR AN IDEAL	271
XII	LET 'EM COME	291
XIII	THE PASSING OF THE STORM	306

Epilogue 335

The Honourable Jim

THE HONOURABLE JIM

Foreword

I HAVE often wished to tell of those three—the woman, and the two men—playmates, enemies, lovers in turn—but my great difficulty was to get at the truth. It seemed well-nigh impossible to attempt the isolation of the one sentimental thread from the tangled skein of passions and of hate which seventeenth century England hath flung to us out of the whirlpool of civil war and of bitter strife.

Indeed, had it not been for the unremitting patience of my kind friend, Lord Saye and Sele, I doubt if the present chronicle of the adventures of his romantic forebear would ever have been written. In the midst of the modernisms and aggressive realism of to-day the life and doings of James Fiennes appear intangible, ununderstandable, a mere creation of fancy.

But at Broughton Castle where he lived, it is different. There between the splendid grey walls in the stately halls, and along the labyrinthine pas-

sages, the intriguing personality of the Honourable Jim at once loses its dream-like quality. In his own old home James Fiennes at once becomes Jim —a real Jim—alive! Oh! Very much alive. And not only he, but Mistress Barbara, and Squire Brent, General Fairfax and Colonel Scrope, they all live at Broughton Castle, as they lived three hundred years ago. Nay! One soon becomes conscious there that *they* are the real people, and we but puppets and shadows, that only haunt by sufferance those same historic places which are their own inalienable property.

The old pile rings now as it did then with the clash of arms and the jingle of spurs: the stones echo the clatter of horses' hoofs, the champing of bits, the trumpet-blast, the roar and bombilation of men who are preparing to fight. And the lazy waters of the moat are gently stirred by the clap of oars wielded by unseen, but very real hands. And in June when the crimson roses emblazon the grey walls with vivid splashes of colour and the water-lilies mirror their white corollas in the moat, it is, in very truth, fair. Mistress Barbara, who wanders silent and thoughtful along the gravel-walks of the old-fashioned garden; she who gathers an armful of lilies to set in the big crystal bowl in the old Tudor hall: it is the man with the scarred hand, the mysterious haunter of the great castle who watches her movements from behind the clipped yew hedge, or who glides into the water like some amphibious monster and is lost amongst the reeds again. They are the real people who

live at Broughton Castle and we are but the shadows: watchers permitted to gaze upon the moving pictures of their lives.

BOOK I: *The Night Before the Storm*

BOOK I: *The Night Before the Storm*

CHAPTER I

A Family Affair

§ 1

LORD SAYE and Sele at Broughton Castle and Squire Brent over at Stoke Lark were still bosom friends when King Charles I came to the throne. They had been at University together, done a tour on the Continent together, and had not yet begun to quarrel over politics, King's rights, rights of Parliament, illegal taxation and what not. These things were still in their infancy. Prophets said that the air was sultry, croakers added that things could not go on as they had begun, and pessimists concluded that sooner or later a devastating storm would break over this fair land of England, and then only God would know when it would stop and what havoc it would wreak.

But that was still for the future. For the nonce Lord Saye and Sele was content to express his advanced views and to call his old friend a fossil, or King's lacquey, by way of a jibe, whilst Squire Brent retaliated by alluding to his lordship—always

in good part of course—as "that damnable traitor." But after a heated argument, wherein neither side succeeded in convincing the other, they would finish their bowl of punch together and part the closest of friends.

Lord Saye and Sele had married early—his wife was a Temple of Stow—and when his first boy was born he named him James and vowed that he should wed old Brent's daughter, whenever that pliant King's courtier decided to marry in his turn. Now every one in the country knew that when my Lord Saye and Sele set his mind on anything, sooner or later he would have his way. And sure enough the self-same year that Jim was born, Squire Brent did marry the daughter of Master Lame, the wool-prince of Fairford and with her obtained a mightily rich dowry. "Unto him that hath shall be given," say the Scriptures, and therefore no one could find fault with the fact that the Squire being a wealthy man should wed a wealthy wife.

Of a truth my Lord Saye and Sele was the last to find fault with such an ordination of Providence. His boy Jim was a fine, healthy lad; he would one day be Viscount Saye and Sele, holder of one of the most ancient peerages in the country; he would own Broughton Castle, which had oft extended hospitality to Kings and Queens, but he would not have a deal of money. The future heiress of Stoke Lark, on the other hand, would own broad and vast acres in Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire and a heavy purse well-lined by her plebeian grandfather. And what could be more desirable I ask

you than the alliance of an ancient name to a well-filled purse?

But it has been an acknowledged fact throughout the history of mankind that the best laid schemes of men do more often than not "gang agley." And so it was in this case. Squire Brent married and became passing rich, but his poor wife died from the effects of a hunting accident before she had succeeded in presenting her lord with the future lady of Broughton Castle. It is a fact that Lord Saye and Sele was vastly upset at this untoward event: not only did he join in his friend's grief, but he did not like Fate thus to interfere with his private schemes. He had set his heart on Jim marrying a rich heiress and bringing wealth and broad acres to the family name and he wanted to make sure that this wish would become an accomplished fact as quickly as may be. The betrothal was to have taken place as soon as the heiress was born, the marriage as soon as the bride reached the age of thirteen. It was unthinkable that such well-laid plans should all at once come to naught.

But not in vain did my lord Saye and Sele bear the reputation of a man who always knew his own mind, and always had his own way. Within twelve months of the death of Mistress Brent, he had persuaded his old friend the Squire that solitude and childlessness were very bad for any man, and that there were any number of comely female children in England, daughters of great families who had more than a quiverful, who were waiting to be legally adopted and by the stroke of a pen trans-

formed into heiresses by wealthy and lonely widowers throughout the country.

So long and so persistently did my lord Saye and Sele counsel and argue, so much did he talk of the patter of tiny feet to liven the loneliness of Stoke Lark, that Squire Brent presently did feel the stirrings of a vague desire for young company, some one to cheer him presently, when old age came creeping on, and that he began to look about him for a suitable female child of rank whom he could adopt and in the course of time make his heiress.

His choice fell on the youngest of the four daughters of Sir Edward Cecil, Baron of Putney and Viscount Wimbledon, who was a near kinsman of his by marriage. The father had in truth a quiverful already, and would be hard put to it to find suitable dowries for all his daughters; he was therefore mightily pleased at this good fortune which would befall his little Barbara Frances then aged eleven months.

The lawyers were got to work and the deed of adoption was duly executed and signed. Little Mistress Barbara Frances Cecil became by the law of the land Barbara Frances Brent, the apple of her new father's eye, and in due course, she being then a year and a half old, was betrothed, as was the custom of the time, to the Honourable James Anthony Fiennes, aged six and a half.

And on the 8th of June, 1638, those two were married at Ilmington Church, Mistress Barbara Frances being then thirteen and her new lord and master in his eighteenth year.

CHAPTER II

The Wedding Day

§ 1

BARBARA FRANCES—or Babs as she was called by her doting father—felt that her wedding day was going to be the most miserable day she had ever spent in the whole course of her life. She woke up feeling wretched; for a few hours she had forgotten all about everything, for she had slept as soundly as ever she had done, but when she woke the whole thing came back to her with such forceful reality that she just sat up in bed and cried, hoping that nurse was still asleep and would not see her crying.

She was only thirteen—poor little Babs—and she hated the idea of being married. She liked Jim well enough when he was in one of his good moods, for then he would ask her to go roaming about with him in the woods and he would show her where the butcher-bird had his larder or where the tiny owl-fledglings had just opened their funny, big round eyes. In those days Jim was quite wonderful, he knew every bird-note, and always could put his hand on a nest. But at other times he would be sulky and silent—not speak for hours—and when he did open his mouth it would be to quote poetry, which either he had learned by heart or else de-

clared—which Babs never believed—that he himself had written.

Then he had no notion of play, called hide-and-seek silly and vowed that girls bored him, because they had voices like shrikes which they used whenever a mouse or a spider or some other harmless little creature came in sight. He was also given to laughing at Babs over her love affair with Tubal, a matter about which Babs' thirteen-year-old dignity was highly sensitive, and he had once told her in the course of wordy warfare between them over the merits and demerits of Tubal as a man and a swain, that when she was Mistress Fiennes she would have to honour and obey her husband, and if he insisted that she should give up her intercourse with Tubal, who was not even a gentleman by the way, why, then she would have to obey, because all wives had to swear before God that they would obey their husbands in all things. And at the idea of obeying any one Babs' whole soul rose in revolt. She had never done it in all her life. Left motherless almost as soon as she was born, then transferred to the loving care of an adopted father, who idolised her, Babs had ruled as a veritable little queen both at Stoke Lark and at Broughton Castle, where she was a constant little visitor. Everywhere her will had been law, and with the exception of Jim Fiennes she counted on twisting any and every man round her little finger. How then could she think of obeying that one exception to her golden rule? She could not. As for giving up Tubal, who loved her, she told Jim quite plainly

that she would sooner die; whereat Jim laughed and became more odious than ever. And now the dawn had actually broken on this the last day of her sovereignty, of her independence, the last morning that she would be called Mistress Barbara Brent. After twelve o'clock to-day she would be Mistress Fiennes! How horrible!

Now was it not a shame to spend this last glorious morning in bed, just when the wild roses were thickest in the hedgerows beyond the pond and the meadowsweet was fragrant by the water's edge? Just when the blackbird set up a singing and a whistling that was nearly deafening, and Dina, the little black and white spaniel, was yapping away for dear life down below?

A minute later Barbara was out of bed and clamorously demanding to be dressed.

"Impossible, Mistress Barbara!" nurse protested. "It is but six o'clock, and when I dress you anon, 'twill be in your wedding gown."

"I will be dressed at this very instant and minute," the little tyrant of Stoke Lark declared, "and in my blue woollen gown and leather shoes, so that I can go and have a last romp in the garden with Dina."

Of course Babs had her way—she always had—and half an hour later she was running down the steps from terrace to terrace and then straight across the park, with Dina paddling at her heels.

Just on the other side of the boundary walls that enclosed the park there was a cottage; thatched and creeper-clad, with a garden around it all

ablaze just now with wallflowers and forget-me-not. There was a low palisade around the garden, the gate of which was on the latch. Babs stood awhile beside the gate; then, stooping, she picked up a handful of gravel and threw it against one of the windows of the cottage, the one just above the porch.

Then she ran away. Nor did she halt until she came to the ornamental lake which was in the lower garden, in full view of the big house. Then she paused and looked at the house; not with a view to admiring its magnificent proportions and architectural beauties which were very great, but merely to glance—with an obviously contemptuous expression—at the windows of Jim's room. He and his brothers and my lord Saye and Sele and her ladyship, and several other guests, including Babs' own father and brothers, had arrived the day before at Stoke Lark, and Babs knew that Jim had the small corner room in the left wing, the one with the narrow pointed windows, the casement of which was wide open. Just for the space of a few seconds Babs hesitated. Jim could be very useful on occasions, for he always knew just where the missel thrush had built her nest, or how many fledglings the grey tit had hatched out. In that way he was more useful than Tubal, who preferred to fish for tadpoles and who was apt to break the eggs whenever he found a nest.

But Tubal was worth two of Jim as a playmate, for, though Tubal was older than Jim by a whole year, he was Babs' slave and he would dance to her

piping just like a great overgrown bear. Why didn't Tubal come? She had called him by throwing the gravel against his windowpane. Babs wanted a playmate on this fine morning, the last she would enjoy before she became a wife; after that the days of play would be over. Somehow the thought of Jim had spoiled the morning. Babs felt out of tune with everything now—the whistling of the blackbird irritated her, Dina was tiresome and the wild roses out of reach. She sat down distinctly morose and peevish on the trunk of the old willow tree that overhung the pond, and she was just settling down to a good cry when suddenly there was Tubal, hot and breathless, having jumped into his clothes and run as fast as he could all the way from the cottage. His black hair was all tousled, and no doubt that he had not even stopped to wash his face, but Babs liked him all the better for the haste with which he had come when she called. He knelt down in the dewy grass beside her and put his arms around her shoulders. "Babs!" he murmured and she could see that he was crying. "Babs, darling! I shall surely die!"

Babs, being thirteen years old, felt thrilled at this heroic declaration. She knew quite well what Tubal meant when he said that he would die. Tubal was in love with her—so deeply in love that after to-day when she would be married to Jim he would not care to go on living. Babs felt very grown up and very important, conscious of her beauty, which had wrought such havoc in the poor

lad's heart. She felt like the princess in all the fairy tales that had ever been invented.

Tubal was the son of Master Longshankes, a yeoman farmer who lived at Shutford, a fine Manor House on my Lord Saye and Sele's estate; therefore as Jim was wont to repeat so often and so spitefully, Tubal was not a gentleman. But his learning was wonderful and his gratitude to Lord Saye and Sele positively touching. My lord, in truth, had been passing kind to Tubal, for Tubal's mother had been Lord Saye and Sele's devoted nurse through a long and painful illness—indeed the physician had declared at the time that it was her devotion that had saved his life. Be that as it may, my lord requited that devotion by unremitting kindness to Tubal. He sent him to Reading grammar school and kept him there for nigh on six years, and Tubal being diligent and clever became a learned and accomplished scholar, versed in Latin and in music—ay! even in theology.

But no amount of learning or education could turn the son of Master Longshankes into a gentleman, and, that being so, he never, never could have aspired to the hand of the gentle heiress of Stoke Lark. But that made his love all the more romantic, since the poets have always sung the praises of hopeless passion. Whenever Babs went to Broughton Castle, Tubal lived only for her, for her entertainment, for her will and pleasure. He did not care how much he was ridiculed, or snubbed, or chided, and he took Jim Fiennes' sarcastic jibes with the heroism of a martyr.

Babs loved him as much as she feared Jim—she did fear Jim a little—and when the day of her wedding was fixed she insisted that Tubal should come to Stoke Lark and see the last of her—since after she was married she might never be allowed to see him again, and to love Tubal once she was married to Jim Fiennes would be committing adultery and incurring the wrath of God. So Tubal was allowed to come to Stoke Lark for the wedding, and he lodged in the house of Master Topcoat, who was bailiff to Squire Brent and lived in the creeper-clad cottage outside the gates of the park, and at Babs' call he had come out without stopping to wash his face in order to bid the lady of his dreams an eternal farewell. Soon Babs too was crying and swearing that whatever happened —adultery or no—her heart would always remain true to Tubal and she would always hate Jim Fiennes and never, never—she swore it most solemnly—would she allow him to kiss her.

And all the while Dina, with her ears flapping and her silky hair blown about by the breeze, was pretending to catch flies.

§ 2

All of a sudden there was a tragedy. Some thirty yards from the willow tree where Babs and Tubal were sitting Dina had discovered a wasps' nest, and the wasps had discovered Dina. In the instant they were buzzing around her, one of them had already stung her on the nose, the others were

loudly clamouring—in the way that wasps and gnats and such like creatures have—trying to find a spot on poor little Dina's body where her long hair would not be in the way of a comfortable sting. Dina, realising her danger, had quickly enough turned tail and was flying like the wind; unfortunately, however, she was running with the wind and not against it, and the wasps were buzzing round her, threatening what would certainly have meant death. Babs was the first to see the impending tragedy. She woke from her love-dream to see her dear little Dina surrounded by a thousand enemies who were intent on her destruction. Babs gave an agonised cry for help and jumped to her feet. Tubal did the same, but he did not scream. Indeed he did not lose his presence of mind; being a country-bred lad he knew the danger that would threaten any one who attempted to interfere on Dina's behalf. Indeed what was a dog's life worth under the circumstances? One might rush to its assistance and be blinded for life for one's pains.

Therefore Tubal, self-possessed and cautious, took Babs by the hand and said with the authority of his nineteen years:

"Come, Babs. You will do no good by screaming and the dog is past help already."

He was so strong and masterful and he held Babs so tightly by the wrist that she was forced to follow him. The whole thing had happened in far less time than it takes to tell. Babs felt miserable and helpless and, when Tubal ran on towards the house, she continued to run after him, even

though he no longer held her by the wrist. But her heart ached for Dina and at one moment, like Lot's wife, she looked back.

The scene had suddenly changed. There was Jim Fiennes—come Heaven knows when and whence—but there of a certainty, and at the very moment that Babs turned to look, she saw him stoop, pick up the dog, and, with it in his arms, run, as fast as any human creature could run, towards the lake. Babs had come to an abrupt standstill; she had not even the time to utter another scream, for the next instant Jim had taken a plunge and he and Dina disappeared beneath the water.

The next second he reappeared—that is to say his head emerged above the water and his hands holding up Dina. Babs at once started to run back towards him, but he shouted to her not to stir.

"Keep still on your life, Babs!" was what he said. "The brutes have lost us and will presently settle down."

Babs thereupon came to a halt; indeed she had already found running difficult; her little knees were shaking under her, her hands felt clammy and her head hot. Tubal was some distance off at the top of the terrace steps. He probably had not an idea of what had happened, nor that Babs was no longer with him. But he must have heard Jim's voice, for he turned at once and shouted to Babs to come.

But she did not move; she just stood and stared at Jim's head with his hair all flattened round his head and dripping into his eyes and at Dina, whom he was holding out of the water and who looked

for all the world like a big rat. And all at once she was seized with an uncontrollable desire to laugh. She sat down upon the wet grass and laughed and laughed till her sides ached and her temples began to throb. She had never seen anything quite so funny as Jim looked at the moment.

After that she did not exactly remember how it all happened. Presently she saw Jim wading out of the pond, with the water pouring away from his clothes. He had Dina under one arm and as soon as he reached the bank he flung her on the dry ground, cursing her for a "spiteful little brute," which at once roused Babs' indignation. She had thought at first to go up to Jim and perhaps help him to get safely on to the bank, but he was so horrid about the dog that she hardened her heart against him. Poor little Dina. What was the good of saving her from the wasps, only to risk her life by flinging her about like a bale of goods? Forgetful of Jim, Babs was fondling her dog, who, after shaking the water out of her hair and scattering showers about her, appeared ready for another adventure.

Then Tubal came running along and with his big, warm hands he rubbed Dina's hair and stroked her ears because, as he said, there was nothing so dangerous as moisture in a dog's ears; it produced canker, which was very painful and almost impossible to cure. Oh! he was marvellously thoughtful and Babs felt tears of gratitude come to her eyes whilst she watched him being so kind and gentle with the dog.

"I think," he said after a while, "if I were you I would take little Dina back to the house now and have her thoroughly dried by the kitchen fire."

Babs' tears choked her, and she could only nod, smiling through her tears while Tubal fondled and patted the little creature with marvellous gentleness. It was most unfortunate that Dina, not realising how kind Tubal was being to her, should have chosen that very moment to turn on him and snap at him; indeed she bit him very severely in the left hand and the blood began to flow freely from the back of it. Babs had a tiny lace handkerchief in the pocket of her gown; she had it out in a moment and tied it round Tubal's poor wounded hand. But what a contrast to Jim's savage, unreasoning fury against the poor, innocent little dog. Tubal never uttered a word of complaint and never as much as slapped Dina; he just turned away from her, and when his wound, though tied up in a gossamer rag, continued to bleed, all he did was to drop on one knee and kiss Barbara's hand.

"This handkerchief," he vowed, "shall lie next my heart until I die."

It really was beautiful! Babs watched Tubal's tall figure till he was out of sight. Then only did she turn to look at Jim. He was lying flat on the bank, face downwards, and he kept on dipping his hands alternately in the water and then holding them up to his face. Barbara felt a twinge of remorse. Jim *had* risked being stung by the wasps even if he was unkind to Dina afterwards, and it *had* been cruel of her to laugh so, when first she

saw his head bob up so funnily out of the water, so she went up to him and called him by name, quite gently, and when he didn't say anything she knelt down beside him.

"Jim!" she called to him again.

He turned over on his back and then looked up at her; she almost screamed with horror: his shirt was stained with blood, one of his eyes was closed with a great swelling above it, his nose was shapeless, and he had a lip as thick as her thumb.

"Jim!" Babs cried again, full of remorse now and of pity, and threw her arms round his neck. "You've been stung!"

Quietly he disengaged his neck from her arm, then he pulled himself up to a sitting position and deliberately started taking off his shoes and turning the water out of them.

"Jim!" said Babs reproachfully.

"Well!" he queried in his slow way, but never once looked at her. "What is it?"

"You—you are hurt!" Babs said, and was ready to cry. "You've been stung whilst you—you—"

"Why, yes! I've been stung," he said drily. "'Tis no use making a to-do about it. Go back to bed, Babs, and in Heaven's name take that fool of a dog out of my sight!"

And that was the end of the incident. Obviously it was not for Babs to say anything more after that. She was—or rather had been—very grateful to Jim for what he had done. He had without a doubt saved Dina's life—she was still very sorry that he had been so badly stung. But

so had Tubal been hurt—badly hurt—a dog's bite might turn to anything, and yet he had been so kind, so gentle, so chivalrous! But if Jim was going to be so spiteful about Dina, there was nothing more to be said. Wounded dignity only permitted the cold query:

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

Whereat he replied:

"No, thank'ee! I shall be all right."

"I will ask Tubal to come back and look after you," she said.

And I am sorry to have to put it on record that in answer to this amiable suggestion the Honourable Jim Fiennes actually swore:

"If you send that d—d fellow here, Babs," he said, "I'll—I'll throw him in the pond."

After which show of temper on Jim's part what could Babs do but walk majestically away.

But here was a fine beginning for a wedding day!

§ 3

Five hours later Babs, standing in her magnificent wedding robes by the side of Jim, might have thought that the whole incident had been nothing but a bad dream. She had one peep at his face as she went up the aisle of the church with Squire Brent and caught sight of her bridegroom waiting by the chancel steps. His face did not look quite normal; the features were still somewhat twisted, and the swelling on his lip had not quite gone down yet; it gave him such a funny expression that she

was once more seized with a well-nigh uncontrollable desire to laugh. Fortunately, however, she did succeed in controlling herself, after which the solemnity of the proceedings reduced her to a state bordering on dreamland and all thoughts of Dina, of wasps' nests and even of Jim and Tubal faded from her ken.

Ever after, the whole of that day—her wedding day—was as a nightmare to Babs.

She hated everything: the ceremony in the church, and the long sermon and the admonitions from old Mr. Jenkins which she did not understand. Then she hated her wedding gown. It was stiff and hard and uncomfortable. She could not have run in it if her life had depended on the swiftness of her movements, and when, just before going to church, she had wanted to throw her arms round the Squire's neck, her huge padded sleeves had got in the way and that horrid corselet impeded her movements, and nurse, who was close by, at once said something about crushing her lace collar, or knocking off some of the pearls that adorned her satin skirt.

She hated the long, interminable meal which followed the marriage service, and all the guests who crowded round her, and who either kissed her or tweaked her ear, or patted her cheek, until she became quite giddy and everything that people said sounded so much gibberish in her ear. Above all she hated those long dull speeches, and all the noise that the guests made, and the wine she was expected to drink and the words of thanks she was expected to say, but which she invariably forgot.

She could not eat properly, because the chair in which she sat was too high, because the horrid corselet pinched her and the starched collar tickled her, and because her hair had been pulled, and her shoes were too tight and, oh! because she wanted to scream and could not, and because she wanted to laugh and dared not.

From time to time she stole a glance at Jim; the swelling on his lip was certainly going down and his nose appeared quite normal again. But he took no notice of her; evidently he still felt wrathful with her because of Dina. Forsooth! As if Dina getting into a wasps' nest had been her fault! Or was he still sulky because she could not help laughing at the time that his head came bobbing out of the water, with his hair all plastered around his face?

And then that awful banquet!

To Babs it seemed that it had lasted an eternity. At one time, in the middle of a terrible long speech from my lord Bladestone, she must have been asleep. The afternoon wore on—wearisome and interminable—through the huge bay-window immediately facing her she could see that the sun was slowly sinking toward Meon Hill.

No one now took any more notice of her. The little doll had played her part, she was no longer wanted; she missed Tubal horribly. Of course he had not been asked to sit at the table with his betters, nor could he be expected to mingle with the servants; Babs felt certain that he was eating out his heart and having no dinner out there in the

creeper-clad cottage, whilst she was enduring a veritable agony of boredom and fatigue and longing for a sight of his dear face.

Her own father and Squire Brent and my lord Saye and Sele had started on one of their interminable political discussions as to the merits and demerits of His Majesty the King. Squire Brent and Sir Edward Cecil, being loyal subjects, naturally argued that the King could do no wrong; he held his crown by divine right and woe be to the traitor who dared to oppose him. At which my lord Saye and Sele openly laughed.

"The King," he argued, "being a man and holding his crown by rights conferred on him by the people, should most undoubtedly be opposed if he abused those rights and used them in order to trample on the consciences and liberties of his people."

Whereupon the arguments became fast and furious, some of the guests siding with Lord Saye and Sele, others loudly upholding Squire Brent's views and vociferously proclaiming their loyalty to the King.

All of which after a while greatly wearied the youthful bride. Not that she did not understand what the subject was about; child though she was, she had been reared in loyalty to the King, and above all in thinking that whatever Squire Brent said and did was right and proper and quite beyond discussion. Wide-eyed she gazed on Nathaniel and John Fiennes, my lord Saye and Sele's two younger sons; they did not hesitate to speak before

their elders, and Nathaniel, who was two years younger than Jim, went so far as to declare that that traitor John Hampden—of whom Babs had been taught to think as of a devil incarnate—was a high-minded patriot for resisting the King's unlawful demands for ship-money.

But Jim, though he was the eldest, said nothing at all. Every time that Babs had a peep at him he looked the same; his face was rather pale and his eyes partially closed; traces of the stings had almost vanished; but his face looked drawn and something about his whole attitude seemed mutely to be reproaching her, but for what she could not say. He took no part whatever in the discussion, and indeed he shrugged his shoulders and began whistling a silly tune when his younger brother John spoke with burning indignation of the King's tyranny and the cruelties practised upon the martyred Lilburn, and he laughed loudly—just as if it were a huge joke—when Squire Brent, frowning with displeasure, brought his powerful fist crashing down upon the table till all the bumpers and dishes rattled and then said angrily, turning to Lord Saye and Sele:

"Take care, take care, my lord, that I do not rue the day when I gave my daughter's hand to your son. An offence against the King's Majesty, our sovereign lord by divine right, is in my sight like unto an offence against myself."

Surely there was naught to laugh at in such a fine protestation of loyalty, and Barbara's glance, which rested on her youthful lord and master, be-

came one of wrath and contempt. Whereupon Jim lazily turned his head towards her and met her aggressively supercilious glance. It seemed, however, to cause him no manner of perturbation, only amusement; a merry twinkle lit up his somnolent grey eyes and suddenly he put out his arms and babbled half incoherently:

"Kiss me, Babs!"

An indignant exclamation escaped Barbara's lips, and, throwing all dignity, all ceremonial to the winds, she jumped down from her chair, and before any one could stop her or inquire the cause of this extraordinary behaviour on the part of the bride she fled precipitately from the room.

Mistress Leake, her nurse, who had brought her up from babyhood and was always on the watch wherever Babs might be, or whatever she might do, followed her young mistress as quickly as she could. But already Babs had given her the slip, and was running, running as fast as her cumbersome clothes would allow her, out into the garden.

§ 4

Half an hour later the bridegroom discovered his little bride sitting at her favourite spot, the slanting trunk of the old willow tree that overhung the ornamental lake at the far end of the terraced gardens—the scene of this morning's adventure.

Urged thereunto by sarcastic speeches from his two brothers and finally commanded by his father and father-in-law to bestir himself, he had—appar-

ently with reluctance—left the festive board and gone out of the room in search of his truant wife.

Babs saw him first as he stood for a moment at the top of the first terrace steps with his legs set wide apart and his hands buried in the pockets of his satin breeches. The whole length of the terraced garden lay between her and this boy whom she had begun to look on as an enemy. She had been very wrathful with him this morning when he was so unkind to Dina and so rough and rude to her—but ever since, after the religious ceremony, people had playfully spoken of him as her lord and master, she felt that she positively hated him. Now all that she wanted was to get away from him; so she gathered up her unwieldy skirt in her small hand and scrambled to her feet. For the space of two seconds she stood quite still, defying him in her mind, frowning at his approaching figure. For he had seen her now and came fast enough down the terrace steps, shouting to her as he came along.

Whereupon Babs started to run. She ran alongside the edge of the lake as fast as she could in her high-heeled shoes. She got hotter and more breathless; that horrid corselet nearly choked her, and once she got entangled in the folds of her gown and came down on her hands and knees on the soft muddy ground. She had had a good start at the beginning, but of course Jim had very long legs; though he did not run—Jim was always lazy—he seemed to cover a terrific deal of ground with those great limbs of his, and though he too had been decked out in wedding clothes, they did not hamper

his movements as her own horrible hoops and skirts. And now he was fast gaining on her. Already he was shouting to her to stop. She was sure there was a note of command in his voice. He was already trying his 'prentice hand in the rôle of lord and master, expecting no doubt that she would obey him as she had sworn to do.

Babs came to a halt; not because she had been commanded to stop, but because she could not run any more. She who was as nimble as a young doe, as swift as a hare, was held in bondage by those abominable clothes. And the very next moment Jim was beside her. He still had his hands in his pockets and did not appear the least out of breath.

A while ago she had been quite sure that she had heard him shouting: "Babs! Babs! Stop!" She even thought that his voice had sounded hoarse and rough as if he were anxious or very cross. But now he stood in front of her quite, quite still, and Babs stood before him, proud and defiant. He looked down at her—strangely, she thought. The glow of the sunset was upon his face; it looked hot and flushed, and the unruly chestnut hair about his head had in it warm, ruddy glints. All traces of the wasp stings had certainly vanished; but his eyes she could not see, the heavy lids veiled them, and once or twice he passed his right hand across his forehead. The left hand he kept resolutely hidden from sight. Babs had often heard people say that James Fiennes would be quite nice looking if he had not such an obstinate self-willed look in

his face; she herself had never paid much attention to his looks. But now she thought him positively ugly, for there was a mocking line round his mouth which she did not like.

No doubt that he was cross because she had given him a fright, but he was also laughing at her because she had been beaten in the race. Oh! he was positively odious!

She had come to a standstill because she simply could not run any more—not just for the moment. In a second or two she would start off again, away, away from Jim and from everybody else, even from her adopted father, who pretended to love her, and then just gave her away to this loutish, ill-mannered boy, just as if she were a bale of goods. She held her two hands against her breast, because the hammering of her heart well-nigh choked her.

Then all of a sudden Jim threw his arms round her and grasped her round the body so close, so close that she felt as if the last lingering breath was being pressed out of her, and she had not the strength even to struggle.

"Naughty Babs to run away like that!" he said. His face was quite close to hers, and very red and hot. Babs felt that she had never hated any one as she hated Jim at this moment.

"Kiss me, Babs!" he said, and in such an authoritative tone that the dignity of thirteen year old was outraged beyond hope of compromise. She shook her head vigorously, being still too breathless to speak.

"Kiss me," he reiterated.

And she gasped out an emphatic "I won't!"

Had she not sworn but a few hours ago that never, never would she allow Jim Fiennes to kiss her?

Whereupon he pressed his hot face against hers, and she felt a horrible burning sensation against her cheek, her eyes, her mouth.

She would have liked to scream, but was too indignant, too deeply humiliated to utter a sound. Some measure of strength returned to her and she fought and struggled with an energy equal to her pent-up fury. After a moment or two she succeeded in freeing herself, and once more started to run; not far this time, only as far as the very edge of the lake, there where the soft ground was already giving way; and the waters began to lap her feet just above her ankles. In fact she had to hold tightly onto a clump of strong reeds or she would have sunk knee-deep amidst the water-lilies. But even so Jim was already after her, stretching out his big, hot hands to seize her again.

"If you touch me again, James," she said firmly, "I shall throw myself into the lake."

All her excitement, her breathlessness had gone. She felt perfectly calm and quite sure of herself. If Jim attempted to kiss her again she would throw herself into the lake, and if he tried to jump in after her she would drag him down with her and hold his head under the water until he drowned. She hated him! Oh! how she hated him!

Already she felt herself sinking deeper into the mud. It was a horrible sensation, for though she

knew how to swim, she had always, when she wanted to bathe, gone straight into the clear, deep waters of the mill-stream close by. This feeling of being sucked in by water-reeds and mud was awful and paralysing. But she did not flinch. She would drown before she allowed Jim to kiss her again. The glow of the sunset was no longer in his eyes; it came straight into hers, almost blinding her with its glory; and against the crimson and gold of the sky she saw his head like a dark patch with the unruly hair all about it; and what the expression of his face was at the moment she could not tell. He said nothing, however, and for a while she was conscious of nothing so much as of a great stillness above and around her, with the great crimson orb of the sun slowly sinking behind Meon Hill far away and outlining the myriads of tiny, fluffy, grey clouds in the sky with a blood-red glow.

Then suddenly Jim exclaimed:

"What a little vixen to be sure!" And he threw back his head and laughed; yes! laughed in that odious, sarcastic way of his, whilst she was slowly sinking into a cold and watery grave. He put out his hand to her, but though she knew that she would find it very difficult presently to wade out of the sticky mud, she waved his helping hand indignantly aside.

"Shall I send Tubal to get thee out of the pond?" he said without ceasing to laugh. Oh! was he not the most detestable creature on the face of the earth? Then as she preserved a haughty silence he just shrugged his shoulders, put his hands in the

pockets of his breeches, swung round on his heel, and walked deliberately away in the direction of the house, leaving her to struggle out of her uncomfortable position as best she could.

She had stained her dress irretrievably, ruined her shoes and stockings and lost her beautiful lace cap; she had never felt so near crying since she was grown up, or so wretched or so hot or so wobegone. Jim had gone away whistling some silly tune; he was spiteful and she hated him. Fortunately he did not take the trouble to turn round and see how she was getting on, though once when she looked in his direction she thought—but no! she was surely mistaken: she hoped she was mistaken because, child though she was, she knew that she presented a pitiable spectacle and her feminine vanity urged her to go and hide herself somewhere where she could be quite sure no one would see her, or else to seek shelter in the arms of her adoring nurse. A moment or two later Jim had disappeared inside the house, and presently as if by magic Nurse arrived, and with many lamentations and not a few coaxings folded the frankly weeping Babs in her motherly arms, then carried her—consoled now and unresisting—to bed.

BOOK II: *The Storm*

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CHAPTER I

The Roll of Thunder

§ 1

FOUR years had gone by since that day in June when two children, at the bidding of their parents, plighted their troth one to the other. Babs had spent most of her time in the schoolroom since then. Squire Brent, being determined that she should have the highest possible education, and himself being much in London concerned with the King's affairs, sent her to Mistress Makyn's school at Putney, where Babs learned Greek and Latin, Science and Logic, and French and Italian and I know not what, for these were the days of high education for girls, and Mistress Barbara had—so we are told—"a keene intellect and rare memorie."

She did not see much of her youthful husband, which was fortunate, seeing that she had taken a real dislike to him ever since her wedding day. Frankly his reputation in the county did not stand very high; people said that he was indolent and surly, and whilst his two brothers, Nathaniel and John, were already ensigns in the army and took an active part in the turbulent politics of the day

in the wake of their pugnacious father, James, the eldest, seemed content to idle his time away with books and scribbling poetry. Now and again he would start off on a Continental tour and not be heard of for months.

Nor had Babs heard much of Tubal of late. During the months immediately following her marriage and before she went to school she had seen him whenever she rode over with the Squire to pay a visit at Broughton Castle. Tubal was as ardent as ever and there had been one or two emotional scenes between them, when they swore eternal and chaste fidelity to one another. Babs had looked down with tear-dimmed eyes on Tubal's hand—the left one—which bore so distinctly the impress of Dina's sharp teeth upon the back of it. The hand would be scarred for life. Tubal was proud of it, and Babs, overwhelmed with the romance of it all, kissed the telltale scar which brought back to her mind the adventure of that fateful morning: Jim so rough and cruel despite his prowess, and Tubal so kind, so chivalrous, a veritable squire of dames, without fear and without reproach, thinking only of her feelings and unheeding the hurt that might have cost him his life.

But all that romance was now the past, and slowly Tubal appeared to fade out of Barbara's life. Squire Brent thought that the friendship with that young underling had lasted quite long enough. He did not encourage Tubal to come to Stoke Lark, and as political differences between himself and Lord Saye and Sele had become so grave 'twas

seldom that he or Babs went over to Broughton Castle these days.

But the young married couple met now and again in London, when Babs came to her father's house in Westminster during the holidays and Jim happened to be in England, or otherwise inclined to visit the capital and his bride. A strange reserve seemed to have crept into the relationship of the two young people towards one another. Babs, who was usually as merry as a cricket, gay and irresponsible as a young fledgling, would—in the presence of her official lord and master—put on the airs and graces of a priggish miss, replying to his good-humoured banter by a curt "Yes" or "No" and airing her knowledge of science and her contempt of the classics and of the poets to the visible aggravation of Jim and the astonishment of her adopted father, who oft declared that there were two Barbaras in existence, one being his own adopted daughter—and a right merry piece of goods—and the other James Fiennes' wife, a starchy blue-stocking who gave him the megrims.

Small wonder then that the young man's visits to the house of his father-in-law were both infrequent and brief. Doubtless he felt that he was unwelcome. The struggle between the King and Parliament was growing in earnestness and bitterness. Lord Saye and Sele openly sided with Parliament, and his two sons, Nathaniel and John, had more than once declared that the army would do the same if it came to open conflict. To Squire Brent the very thought of a conflict with the King's

divine Majesty was nothing less than blasphemy and in his heart he felt that all the contumacious members of the House of Commons, those who had resisted the authority of the King, curtailed his powers, impeached his friends, coerced and threatened him, were the accursed children of Belial. To his old friend Saye and Sele he would no longer listen. "If I did," he once said in his wrath, "I would forbid ye my house."

After that, many months went by before Jim came again. When he did, his manner had undergone a change. Its former uncouthness had gone, giving place to a kind of detached air of indifference as if the mighty conflict 'twixt King and Parliament which was threatening to convulse his native land to its innermost foundations was a matter that did not concern him in the least. He expressed no opinion, one way or the other, though pressed to do so by old Squire Brent, who, a hot-headed partisan himself, could not understand how any Englishman could remain half-hearted when the storm of Civil War was threatening to break at any moment. In fact, I verily believe that on this occasion Squire Brent would have preferred a good strong argument with Jim (an argument wherein of course his own views would prevail) rather than this apathy which was vastly unbecoming in a healthy young English gentleman.

Mistress Barbara openly showed her contempt of her phlegmatic lord.

"While all the manhood of England," she said with a taunting glance at her young husband, "will

be taking up arms in defence of ideals and the justice of a cause, you, I imagine, sir, will go on a Continental tour or write sonnets in praise of the moonlight on the moat at Broughton."

Jim smiled good-humouredly.

"Now you come to mention it, m'dear," he said lightly, "I did once write a very fair sonnet in praise of the moonlight over the moat. An you will permit me, I could repeat you one or two of the best stanzas; one, for instance, which begins thus—"

An angry exclamation from Barbara however arrested the young man's flow of eloquence.

With head tossed and shoulders raised in unmeasured scorn, his child-wife had flounced out of the room. He turned with a lazy, puzzled expression to seek an explanation from the Squire.

"Marry, sir," the old man exclaimed with a contemptuous laugh. "My daughter is more a man than you. She is a loyal subject of His Majesty, it is true, but methinks she would sooner see you hotly enthusiastic on your father's side than a malleable piece of putty with no convictions of your own."

Whereat Jim gave a good-humoured smile and a nod of the head; then, seeing that his presence was in very truth distasteful to every one in the house, he calmly took his leave.

§ 2

And a few weeks later the storm broke over the land. King and Parliament had come to open con-

flict and the first page was writ in that bloody chronicle which has forever sullied the annals of English history. Brother against brother, father against son, kindred against kindred, man's hand against his fellow-citizen; for years and decades after this awful day a spirit of hatred, of suspicion, of cruelty, reigned in the hearts of a peace-loving, entirely civilian people. Men took up arms who had never thought of fighting before, sometimes because of the ideal that animated their leaders, but more often for the gain to be acquired by fighting on one side or the other. "For the King," "For the people" were the war cries that caused brothers to hate one another, or a son to raise his hand against his own father.

At first it was only over a few that bitter passions reigned, it was only a few that embraced one cause or the other from ardent selflessness or passionate loyalty; for the majority that conflict meant an abstract idea, an obstinate will, sometimes merely a question of caste or even of topography. Later on it all became more bitter, more desperate, when every one began to suffer privations, confiscations, exile from home, severance from children and family ties. After Naseby, sullen obstinacy burst into flaming hate; after the tragedy of '49 passions were let loose more savage and vengeful than this peaceful island had ever known even in the darkest hours of its nascent history. But not at first.

Squire Brent was of those whose passionate attachment to the King blinded him to every possible issue save the ultimate triumph of the royal cause.

"God is on the side of His anointed," he declared with fanatical fervour on that memorable 22nd day of August when King Charles I raised his standard at Nottingham and thereby declared war against his parliament. "All those miscreants shall be wiped off the face of the earth; they who have dared to raise impious hands against their sovereign lord and King shall suffer eternal damnation."

He was in a highly excited state, marching up and down the long, narrow dining hall of Stoke Lark where the news had just reached him by mounted messenger. He himself had come to Stoke Lark but a month ago, with a view to recruiting enthusiasts for the King's cause among the village lads. Barbara was with him—no longer Babs, mark you! save to her old nurse and to her fond adopted father, to every one else Mistress Barbara Fiennes, wife of my lord Saye and Sele's eldest son. She had left school and gladly followed the Squire into the solitudes of Warwickshire ready to take her share in helping the King to fight his enemies. There was no lack of enthusiasm about Barbara Fiennes. For the King's cause was a sacred cause, as vital to her as her religion, and the King's person was in its sanctity second only to that of God himself.

She sat in a high-backed chair, with hands folded idly in her lap, watching the Squire in his restless pacing up and down the room. The old man's firm tread rang upon the flagstones, from time to time he would clasp and unclasp his hands which he held behind his back, or utter an excited ejaculation, apos-

trophising either his adopted child or no one in particular,—just the heavens, or the earth, or the walls of his ancestral home.

"God will teach them," or "My God, what a lesson it will be to them all!"

Once Barbara ventured to add:

"They must pray in all the churches for success to the King's cause."

Whereupon Squire Brent turned swiftly on his heel and confronted his daughter with a wrathful exclamation.

"Pray?" he cried with lofty scorn. "Of course the parsons shall pray. What else are they for? But you do not doubt, I hope, Babs, that anything but success can attend the King's cause?"

Barbara hastened to reassure him.

"And," he added, "that anything but damnation can await those abominable rebels?"

The girl nodded eagerly. Her enthusiasm and loyalty were at least equal to the Squire's. In Mistress Makyn's school there were many daughters of aristocratic parents, sent there for their education, because Mistress Makyn herself had been at one time governess to the royal children, and parents knew that their girls would be brought up in the soundest of political principles as well as in unimpeachable learning.

She listened with eager attention now to all the Squire's plans for aiding His Majesty in this great struggle against his rebel subjects. First there would be the question of money. Squire Brent was passing rich and he had the disposal of his late

wife's fortune in mind. It had been left to him absolutely and he himself had created a trust for the monies for the benefit of his adopted child; but what were trusts and other legal nonsense worth now that the King himself was in need. Barbara herself most willingly consented that the money be put to any use the Squire thought best. And he had other plans, land that he could sell, mortgages that he could raise, and so on—it would only be for a temporary emergency; in a few weeks, days perhaps, the rebels would be brought to their senses, their leaders would be dangling on gibbets all over the country, and old traitors like Saye and Sele over at Broughton would find it more comfortable to go to France for their health.

Oh! it would all be over in a month!

§ 3

It was when Squire Brent's excitement was at its height that old Jennings, his butler, announced that Mister James Fiennes had just arrived at the Manor, having ridden over from Broughton Castle.

"Show him in, Jennings," the old man exclaimed. "Show him in! Nothing could please me better than to see Master Jim's crestfallen mien to-day!"

Then, when Jennings had gone, he went on talking to Barbara:

"I often told that rascally Saye and Sele and his precious sons that they would live to rue all their tall talk. See what a terrible position the whole family is in at the present moment! The King

will not accept their submission quite so easily as they imagine, and they will have to eat a deal of humble pie—enough to give them mighty indigestion I reckon. They tell me that Master Nathaniel and his brother John are well versed in the science of arms and that their precious father has raised a regiment in Oxfordshire. Well! they might all of them earn their pardon by placing that regiment at the service of the King, but my advice to His Majesty would be: Do not trust those whilom traitors. They talked and they blustered once. Now when they see that Your Majesty is in grim earnest they try to lick the royal boots hoping that the past may be forgotten, but—"

At this point of his tirade the old Squire was once more interrupted by the entry of Jennings, who ushered in Master James Fiennes.

Squire Brent came to a halt in front of the monumental hearth, with his stout old legs set well apart, his hands clasped behind his back. His white moustache and pointed beard seemed to bristle with triumph, not unmixed with scorn, as he eyed the young man who at first had advanced rapidly into the room, then halted, irresolute for a moment, glancing hesitantly first on his wife, then almost defiantly on the Squire. He was dressed very plainly and his clothes looked travel-stained, his kerseymere breeches of a drab colour, and his leather jerkin with plain lawn collar appeared in strange contrast to the Squire's rich suit of purple satin, with the delicate frill and cuffs of fine organdie and lace, whilst Jim's closely cropped chestnut hair seemed

to mock the flowing grey locks of the older man.

He no longer looked at Barbara now and she was able to study him and his appearance at leisure. He was tall, though not above the average, and appeared endowed with a wiry rather than a powerful physique. Barbara in her mind agreed with those who said that James Fiennes looked wilful and obstinate. Something about him at this hour brought back before her mental vision the picture of her wedding morn and of Jim sitting by the edge of the lake and shaking the wet out of his shoes, with his face all swollen, and obstinately closing his ears and heart against her kindness and pity. She remembered how hard and unkind he had been about poor little Dina, who even now was crouching against her skirts, as if she too had unpleasant recollections of her rescuer. Instinctively Barbara, remembering that fateful morning, gave a glance down at the little dog, then up once more at Jim. He caught her look and his face suddenly lighted up with a whimsical smile which, for the moment, obliterated the hard lines of self-will and obstinacy.

"Well, young man!" the Squire began after a while. "And what pray hath brought you here to-day? You are amazingly tongue-tied, I see, but at this I do not marvel. What I do marvel at is how such as you have the impudence to sue for pardon, now when you feel that your precious necks are in danger."

Then as Jim made no reply, appeared tongue-tied indeed, the Squire went on more testily:

"I suppose you have come to ask me to use my influence with His Majesty and obtain some measure of indulgence for you. But I'll not do it," he went on resolutely. "I'll not do it. As you have made your treacherous beds, you and the whole brood of you, and your father who should have known better—he a peer of this realm and at one time my friend—so shall ye lie in it, without help from me to get ye out. France or some other such God-forsaken, immoral country is a more fitting place for such as ye to dwell in after ye've polluted this fine air of England with your pestiferous treason."

He was lashing himself into greater and greater fury whilst Jim Fiennes remained silent. In fact it was the young man's silence that exasperated his elder.

"Damn it, sir!" the latter exclaimed with tempestuous violence. "Why don't you speak?"

The ghost of a whimsical smile appeared once more on Jim's face, once more chasing away for a while the look of hard obstinacy which had gradually crept back into it under the torrent of the old man's insults.

"Your honour has not as yet given me leave to put in a word edgewise," he said simply.

"Well! I give it you now, sir," Squire Brent retorted. "And damn your impudence. Say on! But I warn you! expect no indulgence from me."

"Alas. I've long since given up all hope of that, sir, and fear indeed that I shall forever forfeit your

good graces, when you've heard what I have come to say."

"You are going away?" the old man broke in with a bitter tone of contempt. "You and your family will go and hide your diminished heads till the storm is past, and ye can return pretending loyalty and hoping that the past may be forgotten? Marry, 'tis wise, if not heroic! Where do you go? France?"

"To camp, sir, to join the army," Jim replied.

The old man frowned, slightly puzzled.

"To join the army?" he murmured slowly. "Then His Majesty has forgiven you?"

"To join the army, sir," the young man reiterated. "My Lord Essex hath entrusted each of my brothers with a commission. It were not fitting that I should remain at home."

Again Squire Brent frowned. He did not quite grasp for the moment what Jim's statement actually implied; he looked at first with a kind of amazement on the young man, who appeared to have again lapsed into his habitual manner of lazy indifference.

"My Lord Essex—" Squire Brent murmured, still uncomprehending.

Jim smiled, a quaint, self-deprecating smile.

"My brother Nathaniel is taking the lead in all this. He assures me that I am too big a fool to be entrusted with a commission—but that, on the other hand, they want plenty of fighting men."

At first mention of the Parliamentary general, Barbara had uttered an involuntary cry. Then she clapped her hand to her mouth. She had under-

stood quickly enough what Jim's statement meant. The old Squire's mind worked more slowly. He kept reiterating the three words: "My Lord Essex?" in a dull, uncomprehending way.

Then all at once the truth dawned upon him. James Fiennes, Barbara's husband, the husband of the child he loved best in all the world, was taking up arms against the King's most sacred Majesty! For the space of a second or two the old man remained quite still—a silence, akin to that which nature assumes one instant before a mighty crack of thunder, seemed to fall upon the ancient Manor House, whilst its master stood with eyes flashing, lips quivering and cheeks the colour of lead. Then suddenly a hoarse shout broke from him.

"Traitor!" he cried, and without any warning he seized with both hands one of the massive oak chairs that stood beside him and with amazing vigour brandished it aloft.

The next moment he would have felled the young man to the ground, for Jim, not expecting the blow, had not moved an inch and Squire Brent was, despite his years, quite powerful enough to have brought the whole weight of the chair down with a terrific crash on the young man's head. But quick as a flash Barbara was already by the side of the Squire, between him and Jim. The latter she thrust, with a jerk, rapidly out of the way, and then she threw her strong young arms around the old Squire's body. Her quick action had warded off a blow which would without doubt have proved fatal. Many a time after this day did old Squire Brent

reproach his daughter for her interference. Much of the misery and sorrows of after years would, he argued, have been averted if that black-hearted traitor, James Fiennes, had died then and there by a righteous hand. As it was, the old man remained rigid for another second or two—rigid as a veritable statue of wrathful vengeance with weapon poised aloft; then gradually the tension of his arms relaxed, and with slow, deliberate movement he lowered the chair and set it quietly beside him; then, very gently, he thrust Barbara away from him, and once more faced the man who had so deeply outraged him.

With outstretched hand he pointed to the door.

"Out of my house!" he murmured hoarsely, for pent-up fury had left him exhausted and breathless.

At first it seemed as if Jim would obey without a word, then he said as if reluctantly:

"I would desire to say a few words to my wife."

"Out of my house!" Squire Brent reiterated more firmly.

"She is my wife," Jim protested, with a note of passionate pleading in his voice, strangely out of keeping with the habitual indifference of his mien. "And I may never come back."

"Pray God you never may!" the old man ejaculated firmly. "For, I swear it by Heaven! You shall never speak with her again until you have made your peace with your King and your God!

"Out of my house!" he reiterated once more, and his whole body now was again shaken with fury, "or I'll have you thrown out by my lacqueys!"

After which Jim went away without speaking another word.

Barbara had not bestowed another glance on him. After the excitement of the past few moments the old Squire had collapsed, half fainting, into the nearest chair. Barbara had much ado to soothe and comfort him. He was trembling from head to foot, beads of sweat stood out on the roots of his hair; his hot, quivering hands clung helplessly to hers.

"Promise me, Babs," he murmured, "swear to me that you will never be his wife save in name—and as soon as we can obtain a divorce you'll leave him —swear it, Babs," he insisted, "swear it—!"

Barbara had been gazing down anxiously on the old man; now something—a movement, a sigh?—caused her to look up. The door leading out onto the landing was still open and Jim had remained standing at the top of the stairs, looking straight into the room. He must have heard every word that the Squire had spoken. When Barbara raised her eyes she saw him framed in by the doorway, with his cropped hair and plain, dark clothes, his shoulders squared, his head slightly bent as if he were about to speak and his left arm hanging by his side.

It was a picture she was not like to forget again in the years that were to come.

"Swear it, Babs!" the old Squire babbled on, almost incoherently. "Swear it!"

And Barbara, looking straight into Jim's eyes, replied firmly: "I swear!"

CHAPTER II

Chance Eavesdropping

§ 1

IN the very midst of the great turmoil of Civil War, Barbara, the girl-wife of Jim Fiennes, grew up knowing nothing of her husband. After that fateful interview in the dining-room at Stoke Lark and that last look she had of him, standing silent and obstinate at the head of the stairs, she had not seen him again. Vaguely she heard that he had fought at Edge Hill and had been severely wounded. But after that nothing more was heard of him, and those who knew the family intimately would shrug their shoulders when mention was made of Lord Saye and Sele's eldest son. As far as the Fiennes were concerned, public attention centred for a while around the personality of Nathaniel, the second son, who had been his father's favourite and pride until the time when he—Nathaniel—surrendered the city of Bristol to Prince Rupert almost without striking a blow and was forthwith arraigned by Parliament for treason and condemned to death. However, he was subsequently pardoned and reinstated in his command, but a good deal of mystery surrounded his rehabilitation. Lord Saye and Sele would of a surety have been too proud to sue any one on behalf of his son,

whilst John, the youngest, had by his hot-headed defence of his brother done him more harm than good. As for the Honourable Jim, as many had taken to calling him, in a spirit of irony, he surely was incapable of stirring a finger on his brother's behalf. Since then it was known that Nathaniel Fiennes, now thoroughly rehabilitated, and John, his youngest brother, were each in command of one of the regiments raised by their father. But of Jim there was no public news. What was he doing in this great conflict wherein the destiny of England was at stake and wherein all, save the wavering and cowardly, the egoist and the avaricious, took their part? Barbara did not know. She did not dare to ask. Squire Brent had forbidden the very mention of the name of Fiennes inside his house, and by his wish Barbara had discarded her husband's name and was known as heretofore by friends and acquaintances alike as Mistress Barbara Frances Brent. To this wish she had readily acceded. Her marriage to Jim had only been a matter of convenience; she never had any affection for the man to whom she was tied in wedlock when she was scarce out of the nursery, and now that she was older she felt not a little sore at the crying injustice which had been done to her thereby. Then on her wedding day, when Jim had tried to kiss her, something in him had revolted her—child though she was at the time—and four years later, when she realised that he was a traitor to his King and had thrown in his lot with the rebel Parliament, she knew that she positively hated him. In-

stinct, rather than pity, had caused her on that day to stand between him and the Squire's wrath, but that instinct had prompted her to stay the hand of a man whom she dearly loved from committing a crime rather than to try and save her husband's life; and the oath which the old Squire extracted from her subsequently came quite readily to her lips.

Then the years rolled by and Barbara had almost forgotten that she had ever been married. Times were so troublous and the business of the State so irregular that there was little or no chance of obtaining an annulment of her marriage; it would have to stand over until happier times, when all those abominable rebels had been brought to their knees and the King had come into his own again.

In the meanwhile the garrison of Broughton Castle had been forced to surrender to the King, and the Castle was occupied by royalist troops. There was some talk among lawyers of Mistress Barbara taking possession of what was legally her home, but somehow the thought was repugnant to her and she continued to live with the Squire, sometimes at Stoke Lark, at others in Oxford with the Court and the King. Of Tubal, the son of Master Jeremiah Longshankes, yeoman, she had heard little or nothing of late. Common rumour had it that Master Longshankes had amassed a fortune by selling fodder to both armies and then had died, leaving his son in possession of the farm and some few thousand pounds, deposited at interest in the hands of a Jew pawnbroker in Banbury. The news

as to this fortune lacked confirmation, but Barbara's thoughts did often dwell upon her whilom playmate who had been her first lover, and she cherished as a fragrant flower the memory of his ardent love, of his passionate protestations and vows of fidelity, and of the scar upon his left hand which proclaimed him the blameless knight, ready to lay down his life for his mistress.

§ 2

Mistress Barbara Brent was at Stoke Lark, all alone, while Oxford was invested, Squire Brent being at the time with the King's army at Leicester; but later on, in the early days of June, when Fairfax abandoned the siege, the Squire, fearing for her safety should the Parliamentary army spread itself over the country, bade her join him at Daventry, whither he himself had gone with the King.

Whereupon Mistress Barbara Brent, waited on by two armed lackeys and Mistress Leake, her faithful nurse, set forth from Stoke Lark on the morning of June the 11th. It was a typical English early summer's day, with a cool breeze blowing from the West; the hills around were covered with purple heather and golden gorse, and in the hedgerows the dog-rose was in bloom. Soon after the small cavalcade had passed Ilmington they spied, on the Northampton Road, what looked like a vast body of men moving in a northeasterly direction. This they took to be Fairfax's main army of whom Squire Brent had evinced such fear, but of a truth

in the distance they seemed to be moving in remarkable order, there being few stragglers in the rear as is so often the case in an army on the march, nor did the men spread themselves over the neighbouring fields, but appeared to walk in serried ranks, shoulder to shoulder and at a slow, even gait.

Soon, however, the secondary road which led by a short cut to Daventry, and which Mistress Barbara and her escort were following, took a sharp turn to the left and anon the intervening rising ground hid the main road and the moving army from view.

Toward sunset the church tower of Daventry came in sight. Already, as they neared the town, the travellers perceived a number of people, all wending their way in the same direction as themselves; men in leather jerkins or civilian clothes, women in sombre gowns or gaily-coloured kirtles; even children did they overtake on the way. Almost as soon as they entered the city they were met by a motley crowd which filled the narrow streets in every nook, angle and doorway, so much so that their horses had grave difficulty in making their way and became restive with the noise around them.

The market place, which they were forced to traverse in order to arrive at the inn where Squire Brent had given them rendezvous, was thronged with men and horses, whilst carts and wagons and other appurtenances of an artillery train were ranged up in close ranks all around the square. The approaches to the various taverns were well-

nigh impassable, men sat about on casks and benches outside the doors, leaving but scant space in the street for the passage of horsemen. Leather jerkins predominated here, but there was a goodly sprinkling of cloth tunics too, and amongst the innumerable plumed hats that tossed about in every direction like froth upon the waves of the sea could be seen a few caps of more sober shape, whilst here and there the steel of gorget or casque caught the glint of a slanting ray from the setting sun.

The King himself being in Daventry and his army encamped on Borough Hill, there was but little more than standing room in the place. There were four thousand men at arms in and around the city which accounted for the congestion in the squares and streets, not to mention the rabble which usually hangs in the wake of an army and of which the royalists always had a goodly number—the ragtag and bobtail of camp followers, vagabonds who had nothing to lose and everything to gain when fighting was going on and provisions were plentiful, beggars and muckworms of all sorts, ragamuffins and cinder-wenches that did more perhaps to discredit the King's cause in the eyes of the sober middle classes of England than any extortionate demand for money or abuse of privilege.

Mistress Barbara's lacqueys had much ado to forge a way for their lady through the throng. At times she was nearly unhorsed by the pressure of the crowd against her stirrups or the pranks of the 'prentices who, impudent as well as heedless of

danger, boldly played hide and seek under the very horses' bellies. As Matthew, her chief man, pushed his way along with many oaths and vigorous threats, the colour of his livery was recognised by some and Mistress Barbara was greeted with a hail of welcome.

"Make way there," Matthew shouted peevishly, "'twere to better purpose than shouting yourselves hoarse!"

"Whither away, Master Matthew?" some one called to him out of the crowd.

"To the sign of the 'Wheatsheaf,'" Matthew replied, "where His Honour Squire Brent is awaiting us, and if ye hinder us further 'twill be at your peril."

And with a threatening glance directed at some drunken louts who were wilfully obstructing his way, he fingered the pistol in his belt wherewith he was happily provided.

"Squire Brent is not awaiting you at the 'Wheatsheaf,' I'm thinking, Master Matthew," said one of the men, raising his voice above the hubbub of the crowd.

"And why, may I ask," retorted Matthew gruffly, "shouldst thou be thinking such d—d nonsense?"

"Because Squire Brent is hunting with the King in Fawsley Park," the man replied, "and they are not like to return before night."

"The King hunting in Fawsley Park?" Matthew rejoined with a frown and checked his horse for a moment that he might the more easily parley with

the knave. "Nay, then thou'rt proved to be a liar, friend. For how should the King be hunting when those accursed rebels are hard upon his heels?"

"Tshaw!" the other ejaculated contemptuously and spat upon the ground. "Those accursed rebels, as you so justly call them, Master Matthew, would not dare attack us now. What are they but a lot of raw recruits who never saw a shot fired and know not one end of a firelock from another? They would not dare measure their strength against us? Are they not running away from Oxford? Tell me that, Master Matthew!"

"Ay! Ay!" Matthew assented somewhat dubiously, remembering the army that he had spied in the distance that very morning moving along the road in orderly array. "I should not call it running," he added thoughtfully.

"Matthew! Matthew!" here interposed Mistress Barbara and pushed her horse resolutely a step or two forward. "Stop that gossip, man, and see that we get to the tavern as soon as may be."

The little cavalcade moved on, but not before they heard a good deal more talk about the King going a-hunting and Prince Rupert's wish to move northwards to meet the Parliamentary army and give them the sound drubbing they deserved. Spirits ran high amongst the soldiers on the subject of the coming fight. They still had their wallets and baggage-train full of the loot captured in the sacking of Leicester, and the fact that the siege of Oxford had been abandoned was but another proof

of how Cavalier pluck and Cavalier science of arms was destined soon to stamp out the last spark of rebellion and treachery.

"They'll never stand up to Prince Rupert's horse!" was the sum total of every man's opinion, and some there were who had it on the highest possible authority that the King himself had declared that "the rebels were weaker than they were thought to be, whether by their distractions which are very great, or by wasting their men."

§ 3

The man who had vowed that Squire Brent was not at the "Wheatsheaf" ready to receive his daughter proved to be correct. The King himself had put up at the inn, and it was crowded from attic to cellar with his retinue: every room, including the public one, was filled to overflowing with gentlemen or lacqueys, and Squire Brent, who was known to be at Fawsley with the King, had given no orders for the accommodation of Mistress Barbara. No doubt that he did not expect her until the morrow and had put off making arrangements for her comfort until then. But such a situation was an impossible one. Mistress Barbara, as Mister Hezekiah Dowdsley, the host, was at once made to see, could not be expected to seek shelter in an inferior tavern, nor could she be asked to spend the night in the public room in company with roisterers —even though these be gentlemen of quality.

Master Hezekiah promised that before night a

room should be got ready for the lady and her waiting maid; as for her lacqueys they must of necessity seek the shelter of stables or outhouses until the morrow, when of a certainty the "Wheatsheaf" would be cleared of all save the most important guests and their train.

In the meanwhile Barbara had perforce to be content with a secluded nook in the window embrasure of the eating-room, where she could sit in peace. She had found her progress through that room a very unpleasant one, for it was crowded in every corner with young officers of the King's army, supping, drinking, card-playing and dice-throwing, whilst the fumes of cooked meats and spiced ales rendered the atmosphere well-nigh unendurable. Escorted by the now obsequious host, Barbara passed between the crowded tables with as much unconcern as she could muster, but she could not altogether close her ears to the chorus of admiration which accompanied her passage. One or two of the young cavaliers there knew her by name or by sight; they took advantage of this slight acquaintance to rise and pay her their personal respects: indeed most of the men rose as she passed by, for Mistress Barbara Brent was one of the most beautiful women of her time, and hers was a personality that commanded attention by reason of a certain halo of aloofness and mystery about her which is often the attribute of women whose childhood has been passed chiefly in the company of men. Barbara, the child-wife, separated from her husband and from her own kith and kin, had, de-

spite the kindness which Squire Brent had lavished upon her, been forced to seek her little joys and gaieties within herself; during the whole period of her budding womanhood she had been thrown on her own resources for guidance as well as for happiness. She was only seventeen when the clash of arms between her kindred and her friends turned her suddenly from a girl into a woman: she had been little more than a child and already she saw around her the passions of men let loose, she had looked on hatred, even crime, at a time when most girls see only pleasure and love. And she had, as it were, learnt to withdraw her soul from the turmoil, to live her own life, cherish her own thoughts and her own ideals in the way that, as a child, she had learnt to play her own little games and live her own little life in the midst of the bustle and activities attendant on the great establishment of Stoke Lark. And this remoteness, this habitual introspection, had stamped her beauty with spirituality, a spirituality that was all the more alluring because she was so very much a woman, tall, full-bosomed, with hair that had in it something of the colour of ripe corn when the setting sun touches it with gold, a mouth that called for a kiss, and eyes that both challenged and refused.

To every bold greeting she gave courteous response, bestowing a smile or a glance as she passed. But she was thankful when she reached the solitude of the window-nook where presently Mistress Dowdsley herself served her with supper, her waiting woman being equally well looked after in the

kitchen. Mine host had himself drawn a tall screen across the embrasure which effectually cut it off from the rest of the room whilst the high backs of the oak settles on either side of a centre table completed the appearance of a private room entirely screened from view. The food was excellent and the wine beyond praise. Barbara ate with healthy appetite, after which, feeling drowsy, she curled herself up in the angle of the tall bench against a soft, velvet cushion which Mistress Dowdsley, with motherly thoughtfulness, had put behind her back. The sun had long since sunk down in the west and the shades of evening were fast gathering in. Through the open latticed window overhead a gentle evening breeze came softly blowing in, stirring the muslin curtains upon the window till they seemed like white wings of giant fairy birds, lulling the dreamer to sleep. In the eating room some one was lighting lamps and bringing in candles, for quaint, fantastic shadows came and went upon the white-washed ceiling. The noise and hubbub had nowise abated, the clatter of dishes and mugs was incessant, the rattle of dice, the shouting and laughing and singing and calls for mine host or the waiting wenches. But gradually all those sounds lost their individuality; to Barbara's ears they all became merged together till they were more like the rumble of sea waves on a pebbly shore, heard from afar. The lights from the room failed to reach this comfortable recess and she felt secure from intrusion, in that her presence was apparently forgotten.

She was left in perfect isolation, in perfect peace and in total darkness.

And soon she fell asleep.

How long she remained in complete unconsciousness she did not know. But presently, when she was half-awake and her eyes were still closed, something reached her perceptions. At first she did not know what that something was; in fact it took her some time to realise whether she was awake or asleep and to remember the events of the day, her journey, the crowded streets, the nook where she had found refuge. She opened her eyes, however, and without moving tried to pierce the darkness around her. Just where she was in the furthermost corner of the window embrasure, it was pitch dark, but above the screen and above the tall benches the white-washed ceiling showed up faintly in the dim light that came from the room beyond; and between the folds of the screen and the benches on either side there crept in long, narrow streaks of light.

After a while she realised what it was that had wakened her. The noises through which she had slept so comfortably had changed in character; there was still talking and laughing, but there was less of the clatter of dishes and no longer the rattle of dice; on the other hand there was much shuffling of feet, pushing and jolting, as of people hurrying away. Yes! that was it. Most of the men who had been supping in the public room were now leaving; Barbara could hear laughing good-byes, the creaking of belts being buckled on, and the clatter of swords, smacks on the shoulder from one com-

rade to another, and all these sounds becoming fainter and fainter and the stamping of feet and the laughter more distant, giving place to other sounds, more good-byes on the doorstep and the jingle of spurs on the cobble-stones of the street.

After that the eating room became very still. Vaguely she was conscious of waiting maids clearing away the remnants of suppers, and of some one extinguishing some of the candles, for the darkness around her became more pronounced, and the streaks of light each side of the screen more dim. But seemingly there were still some who lingered on after the others had gone, for Barbara could hear a discreet hum of voices, as of men talking confidentially to one another and half afraid of being overheard. Now and again a few isolated words reached her ears.

"The King's cabinet" recurred once or twice, and "private correspondence," followed by "folly, folly," reiterated at intervals with growing emphasis.

The conversation appeared to be carried on by some half dozen men, in the intervals of drinking, for Barbara could hear the banging of pewter mugs against the table, and once there was a call for "more of that excellent Rhine wine." The table round which these men sat was apparently quite close to the bench against the tall back of which Barbara was leaning, for she could even hear the gurgling of the wine as it was poured out of the bottles and the frequent smacking of lips.

All at once there was a great commotion in the

house. The door of the public room was flung open, a man's loud voice could be heard giving orders, speaking as one in authority; immediately the men in the room rose, there was a clatter of chairs being pushed back and one or two objects being overturned either in hurry or excitement. Then the same authoritative voice called again:

"Gentlemen, His Majesty."

After which there came the reverberation of firm footsteps upon the tiled floor, the jingling of spurs, the clicking of heels, accompanied by a hasty "Good even to ye!" from a pleasant, cultured voice.

The next few moments were taken up by the newcomers apparently seating themselves at the table, together with the usual bustle attendant upon the arrival of distinguished guests at an inn.

Barbara did not dare to move; indeed she wished herself anywhere but where she was at the present moment. Respect for His Majesty's presence, fear to appear before him in her present dishevelled and travel-stained condition caused her to remain cowering in the corner of the bench, terrified lest Mistress Dowdsley, remembering her, would presently call for her to go to her room. But even frightened and anxious as she was, she could not help hearing one of the conversations that went on so close to her.

The King appeared greatly angered about something, for presently he raised his voice and said sternly:

"It were a strange thing indeed if my marching army be governed by my council sitting at Oxford."

"Those civilian busybodies"—here interposed a harsh voice to the accompaniment of several oaths —"had best be put in their proper places at once. Let their business be to provide us with the means for a fight—we'll do the rest."

In those harsh, somewhat arrogant tones, in the familiar oaths and manner of speaking Barbara had at once recognised the voice of Prince Rupert, the King's nephew, a man who was known to have boundless influence over His Majesty's Councils.

"Let Your Majesty but send word to Goring and Gerard to join us," came anon from another speaker, "and in a week all fighting will have ceased in England, for Fairfax's army is already on the run and we can make short work of them, now that their failure at Oxford hath broken their impudence."

"That is folly, my good Digby," Prince Rupert rejoined with his usual decisive manner. "Gerard cannot come to join us and we have sent to Goring, who hath failed to reply. Let Langdale rally his Yorkshiremen and we'll attack Leven's rear before he has time to breathe after the drubbing Montrose hath just given him; such a reverse would further demoralise the rebels and . . ."

"And ye know well that this too is folly," the King broke in, his even, gentle voice in strange contrast to the energy and harshness of the others. "We must before everything look to the future of our good city of Oxford. It hath stood one investment and escaped capture almost by a miracle; had Fairfax not abandoned the siege it could not have held out three weeks for lack of provisions, as

ye well know, gentlemen. We must see to it that such dangers do not threaten us again," he added with quiet decision, "and it will be some days ere we can collect a sufficiency of live stock, of corn and so on to despatch to the garrison. But until that is done we must remain here."

Rupert uttered an impatient oath, and another speaker went on somewhat sullenly:

"Delay is oft more dangerous than action. My men would not find a march back to Oxford greatly to their liking."

"I know, my good Langdale," the King retorted drily, "that your Yorkshiremen's patriotism is of an unpleasantly local character. Their allegiance to us starts vacillating as soon as they are ordered to leave their own county and to follow their King where they are most needed."

"They are ignorant yokels for the most," he who was called Langdale murmured, but was quickly interrupted by a gruff voice that had the West country burr in its tone.

"Ignorant yokels, bah!" the gruff voice said. "Traitors I should call them and—"

Apparently the last speaker was forcibly silenced at this stage with a commanding: "Hush, in God's name!" from one of his friends, and "Walls even in Daventry have ears!" from another.

But, nothing daunted, the man from the west stuck to his point.

"Bah!" he muttered sullenly. "Listeners, 'tis averred, never hear good of themselves. If some of those Yorkshire captains are about, let them

hear what I say; and, mark my words, Your Majesty," he added, "they'll give ye trouble yet, unless you hang one or two of them on the nearest gallows-tree."

"They'll be out of the way to-morrow, you old croaker," the Prince retorted with a laugh, "for by His Majesty's leave I'll have them in Leicester by sundown, on the way to give Leven a sound drubbing whilst ye do the same to Fairfax and his Psalm-singing crowd."

"Time enough for that, my dear Rupert," the King rejoined with a weary sigh. "We must look after Oxford first; after that 'twill be time enough to beat Leven and Fairfax too. Tshaw, man! have ye forgotten Drake?"

"No, Your Majesty!" Rupert riposted lightly. "Drake finished his game of bowls when the Armada was in sight and I propose by your royal leave to hunt again in Fawsley Park with Your Majesty to-morrow, vainly hoping for a sight of an army of traitors."

"'Tis a sight Your Highness cannot very well miss," remarked Digby drily.

"How so?" queried the Prince.

"Hath Your Highness not heard the news, or His Majesty either?"

"No," the King replied, "what news?"

"That Fairfax hath established himself at Kislingbury with his army."

"Kislingbury?" the Prince queried nonchalantly. "And where the devil is Kislingbury, I pray you, sir?"

"Not eight miles from here. 'Tis said that he has nigh on thirteen thousand men with him."

Prince Rupert gave a loud laugh. Barbara, in her mind, could picture him lounging over the table, his fine, white hands toying with the lace at his throat.

"No!" he said lightly. "No, my dear Digby. I had not heard. Doth it interest you much?" he went on with added flippancy.

"I cannot help remembering," Digby rejoined, "that our army numbers less than eight."

"And that I am about to take Langdale and his Yorkshiremen up north with me, eh?" the Prince rallied him gaily.

"Which will leave His Majesty with but six thousand men," muttered another man.

"And the regiments are all scattered some way from their central post," came in conclusion from Digby, the only man who appeared inclined to pessimism.

Again Prince Rupert laughed.

"Six thousand, or eight thousand, or four," he said and loudly called for wine, "what do we care? Those canting Psalm-singers scarce know one end of their muskets from the other; as soon as they behold the King's army they run, like so many rabbits, back to their burrows."

Whereupon the King, who had been silent for the last few moments, added in tones of good-humoured banter:

"Are you forgetting Leicester, my good Digby, and that Fairfax and his crowd of whom you speak

were forced to raise the siege of Oxford, not knowing how to attack even an unfortified town?"

"I was not forgetting Leicester, Your Majesty," Digby replied with quiet insistence, "but I was also remembering Marston Moor."

There was a moment's silence after that, as if the cold hand of memory had suddenly passed over those enthusiasms and that flippancy and brought them back to face a reality which they would fain forget.

Then the gentle voice of King Charles was raised once more.

"Ironsides," he said quietly, "is back at Westminster, so we are told; engaged chiefly in making speeches. He'll not trouble us again."

"By your leave, Sire," one of the men rejoined, "some say that the Commons have appointed Oliver Cromwell to the Lieutenant-Generalship of their army and that he hath recruited three thousand foot and a thousand horse."

"And if he hath," Rupert retorted with a sneer, "are ye all afraid of Oliver Cromwell now?"

The taunt appeared to have stung them all into silence. Barbara, in her cosy nook, was enduring an agony of terror. She scarcely dared to breathe. Every moment she feared that Mistress Dowdsley would come and call for her to go to her room. The situation was becoming intolerable. She felt that she had no right to be here and to hear all that was said, and yet, having remained so long, she did not know how to disclose her presence and how she would explain her silence. She would

never dare to appear before the King; and would these gentlemen believe that she had been half asleep all this while, or would they resent what they might term a woman's curiosity to pry into the councils of men?

Be that as it may, she felt that her best—nay, her only—course would be to remain where she was, curled up in the corner of the bench, and if discovered presently to feign a deep sleep, from which she would, to all appearances, wake with difficulty. Whilst thus meditating on her future actions she lost the drift of the conversation that still went on between His Majesty and the leaders of his army until Squire Brent's name, spoken by the King once more, arrested her attention.

"Have any of you gentlemen seen Michael Brent?" Charles was asking. "He left us as soon as he came into the city, saying he had arranged to meet his daughter at one of the taverns."

"He must have been detained somewhere then," Prince Rupert interposed, "as he told me that he would meet fair Mistress Barbara here, but that he did not expect her until to-morrow."

"I am always sorry for the wench," the King deigned to say. "It is a terrible fatality that she should be tied in marriage to one of those abominable Fiennes."

"'Tis a marriage only in name, Your Majesty," said Sir Marmaduke Langdale, who was an intimate friend of Squire Brent, "and as soon as all this trouble is over there should be no difficulty in obtaining a divorce."

"None if we can help the wench to it," assented His Majesty graciously. "And now, gentlemen," he added, rising, "we'll bid you good night. We've had a rare day's sport and hope to have another to-morrow ere those damned rebels come further North to harass us. But methinks," he concluded carelessly, "that there is not much fear of that."

"None, Your Majesty, I'll pledge mine oath," Prince Rupert declared, "and if you will but grant me leave to go North with those disaffected Yorkshiremen—"

"If Your Majesty will grant me leave," Digby broke in hurriedly, "to stir up Goring again I'll answer for it that the rebel army will never harass us again."

"'Tis folly, my good Digby," the Prince interposed harshly.

And in a moment the whole wordy battle was fought over again. Prince Rupert's plan to go north and to attack Leven was hotly contested by Digby, who desired to rally with Goring's horse and with their aid fall on Fairfax's retreating army. Voices rose to an angry pitch; some sided with Rupert, others with Digby, whilst now and again could be heard King Charles's voice, mildly raised in protest.

"Peace, gentlemen!" he would say, and in her mind Barbara could see him, full of dignity and gentleness, his beautiful face pale with anxiety and one of his exquisite hands raised in admonition. "Please; we entreat."

And at one time, when the argument looked to

be degenerating into open quarrel, Barbara heard him quite distinctly murmuring with a sigh:

"Such dissensions will rob us of victory."

But his own indecision was painfully apparent. At one time he seemed dejected, anxious, discussing one plan with Rupert and another with Digby, more desirous of avoiding Fairfax than of giving him battle; at another he was laughing, ridiculing the rebel army, the so-called New Model, of which there had been so much talk, and which even Oliver Cromwell's genius could never mould into shape.

Then after a while the arguments subsided, the King apparently retiring to his rooms and Prince Rupert to his lodgings; one or two of the gentlemen were staying at the "Wheatsheaf" in attendance on His Majesty, whilst others had found quarters elsewhere. Anyway there were renewed "Good nights" and "Good-byes" and respectful leavetakings from King Charles and the Prince, who arranged for another day's sport at Fawsley Park on the morrow.

Two or three of the officers still tarried in the eating-room. Barbara could hear them talking: there was Langdale and Digby and the man with the Somerset accent. It was he who said presently:

"You did not say anything to His Majesty about his cabinet?"

"No," Digby replied. "I said all I could this morning, and His Majesty promised me that to-morrow or next day at latest he would send the whole of his private correspondence for safe-keeping to Oxford."

"God grant he may!" Langdale ejaculated. "I've always maintained that if that correspondence, especially the one with Lorraine, were to fall into the hands of some of those rebels, there would be the devil or more to pay."

"I wish we could have persuaded His Majesty not to write quite so freely to the Queen," Digby rejoined, "and to keep drafts and copies of his letters to Lorraine is nothing short of madness. With a train on the march there is constant risk of a private cabinet falling into evil hands."

"Oxford is no safe receptacle either," the other remarked, "if the city had capitulated. What then?"

"True enough," assented Langdale. "It is all very difficult. Anyway Oxford would be safe enough for the moment. We must pray for the best."

"Amen to that!" concluded one of the others. "Well, gentlemen, I am for bed. What say you?"

"I say Amen. Where do you lodge?"

"At the 'Running Footman.' And you?"

"Sir Marmaduke and I are both housed in the 'Grammar School.' "

" 'Tis on my way. Shall we walk together?"

"At your service. Our linkmen are outside."

"I have a fellow too; the streets are swarming with rogues. After you, gentlemen."

A moment or two later the eating room was to all appearance deserted; the sound of voices grew fainter as the three officers went across the hall,

then paused a while in the porch to greet a newcomer. Barbara thought that in the latter she recognised the lusty tones and cheery laugh of Squire Brent. Then all was silent again.

CHAPTER III

The Spy

§ 1

THE time had now come when Barbara felt that she might at least venture to move. She had sat so entirely motionless for so long that her muscles felt stiff and at first refused her service, and, despite the warmth of this June evening, she felt an uncomfortable shiver down her spine and her feet and hands were quite cold.

She was still absolutely motionless when, suddenly, she became aware of something moving stealthily, cautiously, quite close to her. The faint light thrown into this secluded nook by distant candles only showed the dim outline of the opposite bench and the narrow table at which she had supped. The something that moved appeared to have been cowering near that bench and now to be moving soundlessly toward the screen. It was a man, wrapped in a sombre cloak and with a soft felt hat entirely concealing his head. So much Barbara was able to note in the gloom. The man—thief or vagabond no doubt—must have crawled into this dark recess whilst she, Barbara, was asleep. He may have done it through the window, though that seemed unlikely, as the latter was so close to her that surely she must have wakened if he had

come that way; or perhaps he had contrived to slip past the screen, unperceived, during the bustle and hubbub that went on, when the bulk of the company had gone out of the eating room some few minutes before His Majesty and Prince Rupert joined the other officers at Council. These were Barbara's first thoughts; the man was a thief, she reflected, nothing more, who had bided his time until the public room was empty, intent on picking up a silver mug or some other object of value. She was not frightened, but she was still numb and dazed with the long effort to remain motionless. The miscreant, whoever he was, had apparently no idea that she was there, and instinct prompted her to remain just as she was, silent and still, for gentry of that type were wont to turn dangerous if they were discovered.

The man's movements were as stealthy as those of a feline on the prowl. Barbara could see him tiptoeing up to the screen, then peeping through the chink into the room beyond; his tall form, broad and muffled in the mantle, looked like a vague, dark mass, scarce distinguishable in the gloom.

After a while he pushed the screen noiselessly aside and was on the point of slipping out into the eating-room when a sound which came from the distant hall made him pause for an instant, listening, alert as a cat scenting a foe. Barbara heard the sound too; it was the voice of Squire Brent, who was loudly calling for mine host.

For another fraction of a second the man stood quite still, obviously measuring his chances of flight.

Then suddenly he doubled back, facing the window. Barbara could not at first sight see his face because of his broad-brimmed hat which concealed it all except the chin, but she saw that he was dressed in dark clothes, with a wide mantle, which he kept closely wrapped around his shoulders. All at once he raised his head. The nook where Barbara cowered was still in complete darkness, but the screen being now pushed aside threw a certain measure of light upon the man. There are moments in life where intuition works more rapidly than a flash of lightning. Such a moment for Barbara was this, when she realised, in less than a heartbeat, that this was no mere vagabond intent on loot, though his clothes were of the meanest and his air and ways those of a common thief. But a common thief's face is usually masked by layers of grime and half concealed by a shaggy growth of beard; this man's chin was shaven clean, and over the upper part of his face he wore a velvet mask. This then was a malefactor come to steal what was more valuable far than gold or silver, come to steal the secrets that were discussed in council over tankards of wine —a spy, an informer, a traitor! And the King had been here but a short time ago and Prince Rupert and the officers of the Council of War . . . they had spoken freely and aloud of their future plans! . . . and now this spy! . . .

The awful thought restored Barbara's courage. She felt suddenly ashamed of her cowardice. She raised herself with a jerk and was in the very act of calling loudly for help when something awful,

unknown, terrifying, smothered the cry in her throat. The man, suddenly made aware that some one was there in the nook, on the watch—in the darkness—some one who was between him and his last chance of flight—had whisked a pistol from out his belt, and the next instant Barbara saw a barrel of steel pointed straight at her.

Paralysed with horror, she cowered in the gloom wide-eyed, whilst she heard the click of the trigger, simultaneously with Mistress Dowdsley's voice in the distant hall saying gaily:

"Ah, Mistress Barbara Brent for sure; she is in the window-nook fast asleep, I'll warrant."

Was it the voice that caused the miscreant to pause ere he pulled the trigger? Barbara could not say. Certain it is that she felt rather than saw him hesitate. That fraction of a second, however, was enough. She slipped instantly out of the corner; but the next moment she felt a clutch on her wrist and she was roughly dragged out of the sheltering darkness into the light. She saw the muzzle of the pistol still covering her, and through the slits of the mask the man's eyes gave a rapid glance over her face. What happened for the next few moments after that always remained vague and shadowy in Barbara's memory. The man let her wrist go, his hand that held the pistol dropped by his side and then he vanished into the shadows. The last thing that Barbara saw clearly was a hand holding onto the framework of the open window, a hand on which fell a ray of light from one of the hanging lamps in the eating-room.

Then she must have partly lost consciousness, for the next thing that she remembered was Squire Brent bending over her in grave anxiety, Mistress Dowdsley splashing cold water into her face and Master Dowdsley standing sheepishly by. As soon as she opened her eyes the Squire plied her with questions. What had happened? Had something frightened her? Why did she not call out? He himself was just the other side of the door and well within earshot. But Barbara could not answer coherently. The whole thing now seemed so like a dream. She did indeed think that she had been dreaming, that the masked man, the pistol, the hand on the window-frame, were all part of a nightmare. She murmured something about having seen a thief and been frightened by him. Aided by the Squire, she tried to struggle to her feet, when, all of a sudden, a pistol shot rang out, distinct and sharp above the hum and noises of the street. It was immediately followed by another somewhat more distant; but the first report had seemed quite near, coming from somewhere at the back of the house.

Mistress Dowdsley uttered a piercing shriek and dropped the vessel full of water which she had in her hand.

"Jesu! Mary! What was that?" she ejaculated piously, whilst mine host gave forth a volley of oaths and hurried out of the room.

Barbara felt a sickening grip upon her heart; her knees shook under her and she had to lean heavily on the Squire's arm, else she would have fallen. Squire Brent turned gruffly on the shrieking woman.

"Nothing to be frightened about, you gaby!" he said. "You've alarmed Mistress Barbara and spilt water all over the floor—and all for a pistol shot or two." He led Barbara to a chair and forced her to drink some wine. The good Squire could not understand why she should be so upset.

"Tired after the journey, I suppose," he murmured kindly.

Barbara smiled wanly up at him, and he took hold of her hand and gently fondled it. A few minutes later Master Dowdsley returned with the tale that a thief had been trying to steal into the house and that one of the soldiers of the King's guard, who was at the rear of the stables, took a couple of shots at the rogue.

Barbara listened to the tale, wide-eyed; when Master Dowdsley had finished she asked him quite mechanically, like a dreamer speaking in the middle of a dream, whether the thief had got away.

"They are afraid that he did," Master Dowdsley replied; "but the man who told me of it vows that the second shot told, and that though the knave did disappear down Moor Lane, which is narrow and ill lit, the patrol will be sure to get him later on, since he was wounded for a certainty and could not possibly run far."

"Let's hope they'll get him," the Squire concluded, smothering a yawn. "It must have been that rogue that frightened you, my wench. Did you see him through the open window? He was probably trying to get in that way when he saw you and made a bolt of it. Eh?"

"Yes—probably—" Barbara said vaguely. "I really do not know."

She felt cold and ill, her teeth were chattering. In very truth she had been scared; and yet through it all she felt that the whole adventure had been a nightmare; there had only been a thief who had tried to steal in through the window and had been foiled in the act; everything else was a dream—the masked man, the pistol and that hand clinging to the window-frame. Oh! that hand! But she welcomed the Squire's suggestion that she should go to bed. Mistress Dowdsley, candle in hand, was already leading the way; the Squire drew Barbara's cold little hand under his arm; then, gently leading her, he followed in the woman's wake. Past His Majesty's own apartments the little party made their way through the intricate passages of the old tavern and then up two flights of stairs, the Squire to his room and Barbara to hers.

But she could not sleep that night. For hours she lay tossing upon her bed, her nerves on the rack, her eyes staring into the darkness and always seeing the figure of the masked man wrapped in a cloak and moving stealthily as a cat toward the window, and then that hand, always that hand clinging to the window-frame. Then in her ears would resound again the report of those pistol shots and her heart would beat in unison with the monotonous call of a ghostly voice reiterating the fateful question: Had the miscreant been caught as he deserved to be? Was he wounded, dead or dying or would

the gallows rid the world of such an abominable traitor?

And when she closed her eyes she saw visions of the past: her wedding morning, the adventure with the wasps, and her little dog, Dina, snuggling for a moment under Tubal's protecting arm and then turning to bite the hand that fondled it—and that hand bleeding, bleeding from the dog's bite which had left a life-long scar.

And the hand which she had seen clinging for one instant to the window-frame was scarred on the back with two jagged lines, just like a dog's teeth, lines that told ivory white against the dark sunburn of the flesh.

CHAPTER IV

A Debt of Honour

§ 1

IT lacked an hour before dawn on that murky night of June. A thin drizzle had started to fall soon after midnight and had since turned to soaking rain. Heavy banks of clouds rolled in from the west and hung above moorland and hill. Over Borough Hill these clouds were tinged with a lurid crimson hue, whilst on its slopes dense masses of smoke, laden with moisture, came rolling and tumbling down into the valley.

A faint, mysterious light, shadowless and grey, revealed the outlines of Rutput Hill and Dust Hill, of Hillo and Broadmoor, and of the narrow ribbon of the Nen traced by a ghostly finger upon the colourless landscape. On the fringe of the moorland, about Kislingbury village, and along the banks of the Nen isolated bivouac fires revealed the outposts of the Parliamentary army. From thence a solitary rider was making his way northwestward through the rain. He followed the uneven road that led straight over the moor. When he reached the top of Classthorpe Hill he reined in his horse and remained gazing out on the crimson light above Borough Hill and on the clouds of smoke that came rolling and tumbling down the

slopes. He appeared heedless of the rain, for he was bareheaded; now and again a gust of wind would catch a corner of his mantle and have a game with it, causing it to flap like the wings of a giant night bird and startling the horse out of his quietude. Then the rider would soothe his mount with a gentle word and thereafter resume his silent contemplation of the fires on Borough Hill.

Slowly the dawn broke. A faint streak of pale lemon-coloured light tore the distant clouds in the east. The upland lost its vague unformed dimness, patches of gorse and scrub and clumps of struggling birch loomed, more solid, out of the shadows. The vague outline of distant hills became more pronounced, and isolated thickets took on fantastic shapes; the red light above Borough Hill had lost something of its weird intensity; and slowly, one by one, faint ethereal shadows lent substance to a brushwood close by. But the sense of loneliness remained, the loneliness of dawn upon the moorland, where bird life is scarce. And the horseman on Classthorpe Hill appeared but a part of silent, wind-swept nature, rigid in his attitude of quiet expectancy.

Presently out of the vast greyness one other figure, equally lonely and silent, detached itself; moving along the narrow road which is a short cut from Daventry to Kislingbury, a man was walking or rather staggering along, buffeted by the wind, like one spent with fatigue and pain. He bent his head and rounded his shoulders against the gusts of wind and rain which at times nearly swept him

off his feet. Every two hundred yards or so he came to a halt and, putting the fingers of his right hand to his lips, he gave a shrill whistle twice repeated, then waited a while as if listening for an answering call, and, hearing none, he continued, staggering on his way.

Upon the height, ahead of him, the solitary horseman was suddenly startled out of his contemplative attitude. He had heard, right through the wind and the rain and the soughing of the trees, the twice repeated call. Immediately he answered; his keen eyes searched the grey distance before him and a long sigh, partly of impatience and wholly of relief, forced its way through his firmly set lips. A few minutes later the figure of the lonely wayfarer came in sight, toiling slowly, laboriously up the rising ground. The horseman at once dismounted, slung the reins over his arm and, leading his horse by the bridle, went forward to meet the newcomer.

"God be praised," he said as soon as he came within speaking distance of the other and with a calmness that was obviously forced. "You are safe!"

"Ay! safe enough," the wayfarer murmured feebly.

"And you've succeeded?"

"Beyond my hopes."

"Tell me all."

The horseman spoke like one accustomed to command. He was a man in the prime of life, of medium height, but looked tall by reason of his

spare figure and the way he carried his head and squared his shoulders. His eyes were grey, deep-set and restless, and searched the face of the newcomer with a keenness bordering on anxiety. The latter, a man considerably younger, would probably, did he stand upright, be half a head or more taller. But now he stooped, as if broken with fatigue; his eyes were ringed with purple, his sensitive mouth drawn down, his lips colourless and quivering, and his firm chin was marred by a two days' growth of beard. His boots were caked in mud and his clothes were wringing wet. His mantle he carried wound round his left arm, and from beneath it thin rivulets of blood dropped down along the back of his hand.

"You are hurt?" the older man asked abruptly and pointed to the hand.

"I don't know," the other replied vaguely. "Perhaps I am."

With his right hand he took off his hat and cast it from him, as if the sodden brim was causing him physical pain. His hair was matted against his forehead and streams of moisture ran from it into his eyes and down the sides of his cheeks.

"You *are* hurt," his friend insisted.

The other was on the point of replying when a grey veil seemed to spread over his face, the heavy lids fell over his eyes and only a few incoherent words came babbling through his lips. He passed the back of his hand across his forehead, staggered backwards, and would without doubt have measured his length on the ground had not

the older man caught him by the arm and helped to steady him. But this rough if kindly action brought a dull groan to the wounded man's lips.

"Come!" his friend said firmly, but with great gentleness. "You are spent. We'll talk later. Can you contrive to mount?"

The newcomer nodded vaguely, whereupon the rider swung himself quickly into the saddle, then holding out a steady hand he dragged the wounded man after him.

"Put your sound arm round me now," he said with quiet insistence; "we'll go steadily and have but a couple of miles to cover."

He turned his horse's head round toward Kislingbury and slowly rode back the way he had come. The wounded man had at first made a great effort to pull himself together, but obviously the strain of dragging himself up into the saddle had been almost more than he could stand. His senses apparently were only sufficiently alert to keep him sitting fairly upright behind his companion, with his right hand tightly held against the other's breast. The distance fortunately was not great. Soon the riders had reached the bridge which spans the Nen just above Kislingbury village. They were challenged by the sentinels.

"Who goes there?"

"By God," murmured the older man, "that blessed password has escaped my memory. Let me pass, my man," he went on with his own loud commanding tone. "I am General Fairfax."

But neither of the sentinels made the slightest move.

"The password," one of them said imperturbably, "and ye shall pass, whoever ye are!"

"Zounds, man!" the General retorted. "Are ye going to let your General stand out here in the rain and with a sick man in his saddle for want of a password which he happens to forget?"

"By your leave, sir," the soldier replied. "Our orders from the General himself are that we are not to allow any man to pass the outposts without he give us the password."

"Then one of you go and seek your own officer," the General said with sudden good humour, "and ask him to give you leave to let your General return to his own quarters."

And for close on a quarter of an hour did General Fairfax wait on horseback in the rain, with his swooning friend lying like a dead weight against him, whilst the soldier went to obtain leave for him to pass the outposts.

"What discipline, hey?" he murmured with a chuckle when presently the soldier returned with the required permission. "The man was right, quite right! I marvel!" he added, muttering to himself, "whether the royalist commanders can boast of such obedience in their men."

He rode on as rapidly as he dared in view of the wounded man's plight through the village to his own lodgings. Dawn was rapidly yielding now to early morning light. The sparse houses and cot-

tages of the village, flanked by some stately elms, looked unreal and ghostlike in the semi-transparent atmosphere. The village itself with the five thousand men who were encamped within it was still asleep. Everywhere, under trees, inside barns, or sheds of every kind, men who had been unable to find covert in the cottages lay curled up, sheltering against the rain. Under the spreading elms horses were tethered and arms and accoutrements piled up. Fairfax had his lodgings in the deserted parsonage; a sentinel was at the door and his soldier-servant was waiting for him. Drilled as these men were in silence and discretion, they showed no surprise at the burden that their General had brought home with him. The latter dismounted and helped his friend out of the saddle; then, ordering the men to look after his horse, he led the wounded man into the house.

The clock of the little church was even then striking four. The General helped his friend into a chair.

"Is the hurt serious?" he asked.

"No, no!" the other answered. "Only a flesh wound; but for God's sake give me something to drink."

Without a word Fairfax got him some wine, meat and bread and placed them before him. The man drank eagerly, but he would not eat. His eyes were burning and his arm felt painfully tender; a slight touch of fever caused his teeth to chatter. After he had pushed the food aside, Fairfax quietly drew a chair close to him and, taking hold of the

wounded arm, unwound the mantle that covered it. His movements were firm and gentle and when the other tried to protest he curtly bade him to sit still. But obviously he was desperately anxious to hear what his friend had to say. Nevertheless when he had laid bare the wound he went at once to fetch water and clean linen, and with utmost care and no little skill he cleaned and bandaged the arm.

"'Tis nothing," the wounded man murmured at intervals. "Your lordship is wasting time—I am well able—"

"If you do not hold your tongue and sit still," the General broke in with well-assumed gruffness, "I'll put you in irons for disobedience."

Only after he had dressed the wound to his own satisfaction did he allow his impatience free rein.

"And now speak, man," he said, and his voice shook with the anxiety which he could no longer subdue. "You were not discovered?"

"No," the other replied slowly, "else I were not here."

"Yes! yes!" the General went on, and, with the charm of manner which had endeared him to all those who knew him intimately, he placed a kindly hand on the younger man's shoulder. "I did not mean that, of course." Then he added with a deep sigh: "If you only knew how anxious I was—all day yesterday—when you did not return. Since nigh on thirty hours I've haunted the moor—"

He pushed his chair aside and began striding up and down the room, with his hands tightly clasped

together behind his back. He was giving the wounded man time to recover himself fully, and now and then he threw him a quick, questioning glance.

"Tell me," he commanded after a while, "where you've been."

"All day yesterday I was on the road," the other replied, with a sudden curious ring of bitterness in his tone, "hiding like a vagabond behind chance hedges and cowering in the mud of wayside ditches like a cur—"

"For duty's sake, lad," Fairfax broke in and came to an abrupt halt, facing the young man and looking him sternly between the eyes, "for duty's sake and for England—remember that."

"By God," the other cried out with sudden uncontrolled vehemence, "I had to remember that, my lord, else I—" He checked himself abruptly and a shudder appeared to go right through him and a look that had in it something of horror passed right over his face. Then he fell back in his chair and hid his face between his hands. Fairfax did not speak, but his glance, which now rested upon his friend, was one of aching, yearning anxiety. A few seconds of silence went by. Then the wounded man slowly rose to his feet; his face appeared quite calm, although it was the colour of lead; with a quick impatient gesture, which seemed characteristic of him, he pushed his hair off his forehead and resumed simply:

"I crave your pardon, my lord. In truth I was forgetting."

The General drew a quick sigh of relief.

"That's brave, my lad," he said quietly. "Now tell me what you did discover."

"Last night, whilst I was on the road, I saw that the royalist army was on the move. The appearance of some of our horse had given the alarm, the King was hastily summoned from Fawsley, where he had been spending his days at the chase, and the regiments which were scattered about the neighbourhood were recalled to their central post on Borough Hill."

"Yes; I guessed that. The huts on Borough Hill were fired soon after midnight. I saw them."

"The King was for remaining in Daventry. He wants to reprovision Oxford ere he leaves. But Prince Rupert's counsel is to go north at once and fall on Leven's rear ere he have time to recover from his late defeat."

"Doth this counsel prevail?"

"No; though it carries weight since it comes from Rupert. Digby, on the other hand, did send in haste for Goring to join the army so that they may attack our flank. But this, it seems, Goring hath refused to do."

"You are sure of that?"

"I have the letter here which Goring sent to the King, begging His Majesty to postpone a battle if possible, since he himself could not yet leave the west."

He drew a soiled and crumpled paper from the inside of his doublet and handed it to the General. Fairfax took it from him, and as he did so his

glance dwelt with a strange, searching expression on his friend's expressive face.

"How did you get it?" Fairfax asked.

"Stole it," the young man replied slowly, "from the messenger—while he was asleep—at a wayside tavern outside Daventry."

A hot flush had risen to his pale, sunken cheeks, and around his sensitive mouth there came a line of bitterness and almost of defiance. There was a silence after that between the two men whilst their eyes seemed to be searching one another's soul, but it was Fairfax's glance that was the first to fall. He scanned the paper rapidly, then crushed it in his hand.

Then he murmured curtly after a while, "I understand that there is dissension in the royalist councils."

"Very grave dissension, my lord—and some disaffection. The Yorkshire horse are not to be trusted, it seems; they want to go back to their homes and their demands are at the bottom of Rupert's counsel to go north. That counsel will of a certainty prevail if you, my lord, do not forthwith provoke a battle."

"What chances should we have?"

"Every chance if the Lieutenant-General is with us within the next twenty-four hours."

"Where is Prince Rupert now?"

"He hath brought the army to quarters in the village about Harborough."

"And the King?"

"He slept at Lubenham, at the house of Mr.

Collins, last night. I gathered that the latest decision of the war council was to continue the march northwards, but that a battle would be unavoidable if our army pressed hard behind them."

"What is their strength then?"

"Less than eight thousand men—and the Yorkshire horse are on the verge of open revolt."

"Then, by the Lord, you are right, lad!" Fairfax exclaimed. "We have every chance to smite them."

He strode to the window and threw the casement open. The rain had ceased and the landscape was flooded with light. With the fresh morning air there came into the room the hum of wakening life. The village was astir; the sounds of men moving, the clatter of arms, the shouts and stirrings and stamping of horses mingled with the bucolic crowing of cocks and the lowing of cattle. The great soldier drank in the cool air of dawn with infinite relish; his keen eyes searched the distant moorland where within a few hours perhaps God would manifest himself and lead His armies to victory.

"The hour hath come!" he cried and turned once more to face the messenger of welcome tidings; "the Lord hath delivered our enemy into our hands. We shall not lack guidance at the hour of battle. Listen to me, my lad," he went on, and once more placed an affectionate hand on the other's shoulder. "The Lieutenant-General is on his way hither with six hundred horse. We'll push on to-day as far as Guilsborough. Ireton with his horse shall ride ahead to outmarch the enemy if possible, and I'll

send Harrison and his men to Daventry to gather intelligence. The Lieutenant-General will be in command of the horse and I'll send him word to meet me and my army on the crest of Naseby village. From thence I can spy Harborough and the movements of the royalists. If they continue their retreat we'll continue the pursuit and provoke them to battle as soon as we can. With Oliver Cromwell beside me and God's hand above us, how can we for a moment doubt our victory?"

He paused and this time it was eagerness and enthusiasm that set him striding once more up and down the room.

"The countryside is with us to a man," he exclaimed; "there is not one who can think and feel who doth not burn with indignation at the outrages committed by the royalists in these counties? The re-provisioning of Oxford forsooth! and at what cost? Spoliation and loot? My God! when I think of Leicester! Lad! lad! if we win to-morrow neither I nor Ireton, nor even Cromwell, can stay the hand of our soldiers raised in revenge for what occurred at Leicester! But the Lord will guide us! The Lord will speak when His hour draweth nigh! We are fighting for liberty, my lad! For England and liberty! Do not forget that! Let no man forget it. The King is a King, but God is the Lord of us all and we are fighting for liberty."

The younger man watched the General in silence; his pale eager face reflected the turbulent thoughts that were running riot in his brain. All the en-

thusiasm to which the older man—usually so silent, so reserved—gave vent at this hour when the hope of victory first became a certainty, found its echo in his heart. Wearied and sick, bare-headed, bedraggled, spattered with mud and stained with sweat and blood, he yet looked the embodiment of that proud spirit which demanded freedom—civil and religious freedom at any cost, at the cost of life itself, at the cost of any sacrifice, any hardship, any humiliation.

Fairfax continued his restless walk up and down the room.

"Lad! lad!" he said at one time. "No one but God himself can reward you for what you have done."

"There you are wrong, my lord," the young man retorted and for the first time the ghost of a smile illumined his pale face. "The Lord will provide, as you say—all in good time—but if I do in truth deserve a reward—"

Fairfax frowned.

"Men do not work for a reward, my lad," he said curtly, "when they serve the Lord and His cause."

"Some men perhaps, my lord, but I confess that I—"

"You want payment for what you have done?" the General rejoined, speaking with slow deliberation, measuring every word. "You want payment? Money? Preferment? Honour? Honours? Bah! if you demand payment then you are not better than a paid—"

"Hold on, my lord!" the young man broke in loudly. "Even from you I cannot hear that word."

"Tshaw, man, since you demand payment . . ."

"I did not speak of money."

"Then honours?"

"Yes! Honours! But not such as you think, my lord! Honours, yes! A reward, something that will wipe out from my mind the remembrance of . . ." He checked himself as was his wont when emotion carried him beyond self-control. Then he said quite quietly:

"Two days ago I nearly shot a woman. . . . Oh! give me a regiment, my lord, and let another do this dirty work for you!"

The General shook his head gravely.

"I could not spare you, my lad!" he said.

"A regiment, my lord," the young man insisted, and his voice shook now with a note of desperate entreaty. "Oh! you don't know, you cannot guess —how can you?—what it means to a man to be deprived of his sword while others fight, to don the rags of a vagabond while others wear breastplate and casque, to sneak like a thief in the night through the darkness, to listen at keyholes like a venal cinder-wench, to lie to the man who trusts him, to betray the man who has shaken him by the hand, and finally when the work is done to steal out through a window like a whipped cur and hide his shame and swallow his tears of rage and humiliation in some dark and filthy hovel with other muckworms and dishonoured varlets for company. You do not know, my lord—you cannot guess—"

His voice had become hoarse and spent; a veil spread over his eyes and the room started whirling around him. He caught at the chair to stay himself from falling. The next moment Fairfax was beside him. With infinite gentleness he drew him down into the chair and held the trembling hot hand firmly between his own, as if by the very force of his own will power he would communicate his enthusiasm and his unswerving determination to this rebellious soul.

After a second or two the young man opened his eyes and looked with a vague, scared gaze about him and then into his friend's kind, thoughtful face.

"Listen to me, lad!" Fairfax began, speaking very slowly and very deliberately as was his wont when he desired every one of his words to sink deep down into the very heart of his listeners. "Let me take your mind back to that trying time three years ago when a man whom we all knew and trusted betrayed that trust which the Lord himself had placed in him; I am speaking of Nathaniel Fiennes. You remember?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Do you remember also that on the eve of Nathaniel Fiennes' execution you came to me, an unknown man whom I had never in my life seen before? You told me that you had exhausted every means you could think of to save that traitor from the fate which he deserved. Do you remember that?"

"Yes, my lord."

"I pressed you with questions and you owned to

me that you were under deep and lasting obligation to the Lord Saye and Sele whom you loved and reverenced, and that in order to discharge some measure of this obligation you had sworn to yourself to save him from the sorrow and disgrace that would surely send him to his grave if the son whom he loved above all things on earth were to perish ignominiously upon the scaffold. I do not ask you, lad, if you remember that, for I know that you do."

"I remember, my lord."

"Look back then upon that day, my lad; do you see yourself pleading, pleading passionately and insistently, the while I was still relentless, determined that justice should prevail in the armies of the Lord? Then out of the very bottom of your heart there came a final cry: 'Cannot you take me, my lord,' you said to me, 'instead of him? I was at Bristol too, I swear it. I can find witnesses to prove that it was I who treated with Prince Rupert. Take me, my lord, instead of him. Nathaniel is the pride and joy of a great and good man, his death will bring a father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave; but if I die there is no one to care.' "

Fairfax paused for a time, whilst the young man remained quite still, his hands gripping the arm of the chair, his deep-set eyes almost hidden by a dark frown of concentred thought as if in very truth he was propelling memory back into that hour when he sold his honour for another man's.

"I see that I need not dwell longer on that picture. You remember, lad, you remember well enough! On that day you bought another man's

life and another man's honour; and for that honour and that life you offered payment of your own free will. A life for a life—honour for honour, those were your words, my lad. I asked no questions—I did not even ask your name—we needed a man—oh! so badly—who would serve us as you are doing now, a man to whom God gave intelligence and a spirit of self-sacrifice which I felt that you possessed to a remarkable degree. I asked nothing more and Nathaniel Fiennes was pardoned; nay, more, he was rehabilitated and restored to his command. I fulfilled my share of the bargain, lad. This is the day of reckoning for you. Will you then forswear the payment?"

Again there was silence in the low raftered room. The great soldier's fateful words seemed to have conjured up strange spirits of fatality and of inexorable power; and through the mellow morning air there came the scarce perceptible sound of a deep, long-drawn sigh of complete surrender.

Then the younger man answered simply:

"No, my lord. Command me."

A cry of joy came from Fairfax's lips.

"There is so much to be done," he said, "even if victory attend us to-morrow—more especially if victory attend us."

"I'll do whatever your lordship commands."

"The King's letters, my lad?" the General queried abruptly.

"His private cabinet is to be taken for safe-keeping to Oxford."

"But it has not gone yet?"

"No. Not yet. He writes much and often to the Queen and her kinsfolk over in France. One of his officers remarked the night before last that if these letters fall into the hands of Parliament there would be the devil and more to pay."

"You heard him say that?"

"Yes, and more. Another said that the cabinet contained the whole of the King's correspondence with Lorraine and with the Irish, when he strove to bring those Irish into England and to introduce Lorraine's undisciplined brigands upon English soil."

"Who was it who said that?"

"The officers spoke of it among themselves. Colonel Digby was there and Sir Marmaduke Langdale. 'Tis one of them who spoke."

Fairfax jumped to his feet and in a moment had resumed his ceaseless pacing up and down the tiled floor.

"We must have those letters, lad," he said abruptly. "The people must be made to see to what depth of treachery a man can sink, even if he be a king. We must have those letters and we'll publish them; 'twill do more for the cause than any pitched battle. We must have those letters," he reiterated for the third time. "Get those letters for me, lad."

"As your lordship commands."

"Can you do it, think you?"

"There is nothing a man cannot do, my lord, if he has set his whole mind on it."

"'Tis proudly said, lad!"

"I'll honour my signature, my lord, and make

payment to you with the King's letters for what you did for Fiennes."

"That will be payment in full, lad. Bring me the King's letters and your debt to me is paid—in full," he repeated with slow emphasis.

"And I should still be your debtor, my lord. I'll not forget again. I swear."

"God guard ye, lad, and guide ye. Now go and get a rest. Ye've earned it and need it sorely. Your bed is ready; go and think of nothing for a while. If we fight, lad, you shall fight with us, I promise you that; but your work must be done first. And if yours be the harder task, then yours will be the greater reward. That is the Lord's promise, lad—not mine. We shall march out probably before noon and to-night I meet Oliver Cromwell at Guilsborough. His thoughts are mine and mine are his. He will know to-night all that you have done, not for us, lad, but for England!—our England—God guard ye!"

And a quarter of an hour later youth and health had reasserted their sway and a tired young body lay between the sheets in a dreamless, restful sleep.

CHAPTER V

Naseby

§ 1

THERE are some records of rare interest preserved at Broughton Castle. Among those none are more thrilling than those written by James Fiennes on the evening of the 14th of June, 1645. All morning of that day he was fighting, but being a visionary and something of a poet he tells of the fighting as of something unreal, dreamlike, more like a picture that unfolded itself before his mental perceptions than a grim reality in which he himself played, worthily one is sure, his allotted part.

According to Jim's own account, from the moment that Lieutenant-General Cromwell gave the order to the cavalry to take ground to the right, and the regiments, suddenly wheeling up into line, thundered down on the left of the King's army with a loud cry of "God be with us!" the world for him ceased to be a reality. It had become a phantasm, wherein horses and mounted men, helmets and pikes and muskets, and orange, and blue, and green, and yellow scarves floating in the breeze, presented a picture that was one huge, vertiginous mirage. He—Jim Fiennes, one of the multitude, a unit in a cavalry regiment—had ceased to be, he was just an atom,

infinitesimal and imponderous, thrown, blind and insentient, into the scales whereon Fate was on this day weighing the destinies of England.

And the while men such as Jim dreamed and fought, the battle of Naseby was lost and won. It was not lost by Rupert's hot-headedness nor by the King's indecision, not by the valour, or discipline, or generalship of either side; the battle of Naseby was won by Destiny against a cause that no longer stood for the greatness of England. On that day of June, 1645, King Charles Stuart lost not only a battle—an incident in the war—but his crown and his head.

We Christians say it was God, the mystic will vow it was Fate, the agnostic will call it luck, but whatever we may call the higher power that overthrew the royal cause at Naseby it was omnipotent and irrevocable. The Almighty Will that is above the Fates, above the Destinies of mankind, had decreed that on that day there should rise from out of the ashes of a glorious past an England more glorious still—a Phœnix with golden wings singed by the flames of intolerance and self-sacrifice, of bitter feud and sublime abnegation, of callousness and hardness and cruelty—the Phœnix of English civil and religious liberty. A puny thing for many years to come, with a light that at times flickered so low that it appeared extinguished again forever; tyranny worse than before, intolerance, servitude, cruelty, vulgarity, hypocrisy, everything that tends to degrade and to enslave, that Phœnix suffered them all, until it rose at last unconquered and un-

dying and carried to the outermost limits of the world sparks of that living fire which at Naseby gave it birth.

§ 2

At eight o'clock in the morning Prince Rupert gave the signal for attack. Jim, when writing of it, describes how successful was that first onslaught, the Parliamentarians driven back in disorder, gallant Ireton falling, severely wounded in the thigh and face, Rupert as usual drunk with the first taste of victory and throwing all prudence to the winds, pursuing the flying enemy as far as Naseby village.

To Jim Fienne's dazzled eyes everything at this period of the battle appeared confused like a blurred picture whereon a few high lights have been touched by a daring hand. Against a background of purple heather and gorse that clothed the surrounding hills with glory, a medley of sabres and muskets, of breastplates and casques all mingled before him in inextricable confusion—and through that confusion one or two incidents alone appeared clear and defined: there, on the left, brave Ireton surrendering his sword, and toward the rear Prince Rupert, after wasting time in a futile attack on the Parliamentary baggage, now hastening back to take his part in what he believed would be a magnificent victory; then, behind Sulby Hedges, Oakey's dragoons harassing Rupert's horse as they come thundering by, and in the centre Whalley, taking advantage of the smooth ground before him, charging the roy-

alist infantry and gaining the first advantage for the Parliamentary lines.

The clang and clatter were deafening, crash of steel, of horses champing, pawing, snorting, musket shot, and petard reverberating, men shouting, shouting: "God and Queen Mary," for the King, and "God with us" for the Parliament. And—here again we have Jim Fiennes' written word for it—in the very midst of the mêlée, in the very heart of the tumult, of this chaos of men and things and beasts charging against one another and striking and smiting and killing—always killing—in the name of the King and of Liberty, three men—each one a giant in his way—stand out like clear-cut cameos carved by the master hand of unswerving Destiny: Fairfax, bare-headed, exposing himself to every chance of battle; the King on his white charger, wearing already on his pale, anxious face the introspective look of impending doom; and on the right, straight as a bronze statue upon his horse, impassive, unmoved alike by Rupert's success and by Whalley's triumph, the genius whom Destiny had chosen to execute her will—Cromwell!

§ 3

All this Jim Fiennes tells us that he saw before the cavalry on the left wing had come into action; he saw Rupert's ill-considered pursuit, the fall of Ireton, the confusion in the ranks of the infantry, the falling of the left flank into hopeless disorder. He saw the three men: Fairfax fighting, the King

certain of victory, and Cromwell biding his time.

The dream-state came later when the Lieutenant-General gave the order to charge, and five regiments of cavalry bore down like a thunder-bolt upon the King's left, the while five more fell on the royalist infantry, and Oakey's dragoons were launched upon their rear. It was like a tempest that, gathering strength as it drives, sweeps everything before it: in an instant men became mere atoms, like dust flying before the wind.

The beginning of the end! Victory turned into the most hideous form of defeat—panic. The King's army gave way on every side, from right and left and centre men turned to fly and, flying, threw down their arms and dragged others away with them. Away! Away! To Leicester or further if may be! Away! Away! Hell for leather! and the devil take the hindermost! In vain did the King himself urge, rally, entreat, command. They would not listen! They fled! They fled! A mad multitude of men on horseback and men on foot, men with casques and breastplates and men bareheaded with long hair streaming behind them, blown by the wind. Proud Derbie and gallant Crawford; Cumberland and Willoughby and Grandison! Some one had given the order: "March to the right!" and the whole of the King's reserve, the whole of Rupert's horse, a while ago flushed with victory, wheeled about at the word and fled as fast as they could spur!

Behind them the mass of Cromwell's horsemen thundered in pursuit, hacking, slashing, exterminat-

ing, capturing loot and men, artillery wagons and horses, smirching these fair hills of England with a blood-red stain.

Far away a church clock struck the midday hour.

In less than four hours what once was the royalist army had ceased to be. The infantry no longer existed; five thousand of them were in Fairfax's hands; the whole of the artillery train, stores, munitions, arms, pride, glory and hope, all that was gone. Over five hundred officers had lain down their arms and the King himself was flying, carried away by that irresistible rush of panic-stricken horsemen flying for their lives.

§ 4

What Jim saw, that Barbara saw too, but from a wholly different angle—both from a material and a mental angle. She had spent the previous night at Papillon Hall, distant about a mile from Lubenham; thither she had gone with the Squire at dead of night, after the King himself, hastily summoned from Fawsley Park where he had been hunting till late evening, rushed his troops out to Harborough. Since that hour the night had resounded with the uproar of armed men on the move and the sky had glowed with a lurid crimson light from the fires on Borough Hill. As soon as the rain gave over toward morning Barbara sallied forth into the open, wrapped in a cloak and hood and accompanied by Mistress Leake. The Squire, it seems, had been gone these two hours past and Matthew had gone

with him, so spoke old Hezekiah, Mr. Papillon's valet, but whither they had gone he could not say.

The countryside was alive with movement. Barbara soon found herself blindly following a stream. The roads and fields were thronged with people, men and women, and even children, walking, riding, driving in coaches, camp followers, ragamuffins, ladies, gentlemen, officers with their wives, soldiers with their sweethearts and stragglers by the thousand. The army was moving south, and all its ragtag and bobtail after it. 'Twas said that the Parliamentarians were so nigh that a battle could not be avoided and that it would have been madness for the King to continue his march to the north. His Majesty had been roused in the early dawn, and since that hour had been at council at Harborough, after which the army was drawn up in array on the hill that stretches from Farndon to Oxenden, ready for any attack from the enemy.

Barbara spoke to some of the passers-by, some of whom were friends. Every one was in the highest possible spirits. Victory was a certainty, never had the King's prospects been so bright, and today's decisive battle would of a certainty rid him of his enemies once and for all; and though the royalist army was outnumbered by at least two to one, Prince Rupert's skill and his magnificent horsemen would soon make short work of those raw recruits whom no amount of psalm-singing would ever turn into good soldiers.

That was the spirit which animated all those

who were on the road on that memorable morning of the 14th of June.

By noontime the whole of that stream was flying for dear life. A panic-stricken multitude rushed like a torrent across fields and roads, over hedges and ditches, down the valleys and up the gradients; horses' hoofs thundering, men shouting, arms, accoutrements flung aside, men and women, pursuers and pursued in one awful, appalling medley. Cries of despair, of terror, of agony made the air hideous with their horrible sounds. Lips that smiled this morning in fatuous self-complacence were drawn in contorted grins of fear; throats that gave forth laughter but a few hours ago emitted hoarse shrieks of frenzy, born of terror or death.

The King? Ah! the King would have stemmed this mad flight if he could. 'Twas not bravery that he lacked. When the rush of flying horsemen well-nigh bore him down he made desperate efforts to rally the regiments that still remained intact; he was ready to place himself at their head, to charge with them and make a heroic effort to retrieve the fortunes of the day. But a friend—'twas my lord Carnwath—snatched at his bridle and cried out to him: "Will you go upon your death?" And Charles, as always vacillating, firm of purpose but weak in will, paused one instant ere he gave the order to charge. At that moment one of his officers cried aloud: "March to the right!" and the last of the cavalry reserve, bearing their King along with them, joined in the headlong flight.

Nor did they draw rein any of them until they were nigh on Leicester; the King and Prince Rupert, Digby and Langdale, the disaffected Yorkshiremen and the flower of Rupert's horse. From every side hosts of the enemy poured in upon them in pursuit, Cromwell on their left, Whalley on their right, Oakey's dragoons on their flank, they came like a flood tide bearing down upon them all, on soldiers and civilians, on vagabonds and gentlemen, on women and mud larks of every station: slashing and sabring and killing, killing with shouts of "Remember Cornwall!" "Remember Leicester!" And in the name of such hideous memories wreaking vengeance mayhap more hideous still.

Oh! the horror of it all! The pity! The misery of it! The awful, awful tragedy! Barbara, who earlier in the morning had wandered out as far as Farndon Fields saw the whole terrible picture as a panorama, just as Jim Fiennes saw it, but wholly from a different angle. She had rejoiced when Rupert first gained a momentary victory, when Ireton surrendered his sword and when Skipton fell; she had trembled when Cromwell's horse bore down upon the Army's right, hampered at first by the rabbit warren that made the ground dangerous for the horses. She stood by now, appalled and horror-struck, when she saw far away on Dust Hill the King's army turn to fly, terror-stricken, scattered like snowflakes before a gale.

A moment or two later she became conscious of danger, immediate danger to herself and her companion, as well as of the horror of what she saw.

She seized Mistress Leake by the wrist and dragged her, dazed and unresisting, within the shelter of the hedge which formed the eastern boundary of the field. Here a number of ammunition wagons had been left derelict and behind these Barbara found refuge, even as the panic-stricken horde came thundering down the slope. Like a veritable nightmare she beheld the awful disintegration, the dissolving of what had been a solid corporate body of brave men at arms into units of miserable wreckages of humanity flying terrified for their lives; from behind the sheltering barricade of wagons she saw pursued and pursuers rush past her like a raging torrent when the waters are swollen with heavy rains and the sluice-gates have been broken. She watched and watched for a whole hour or more while this mad cavalcade continued and the horrors which she saw then she knew that she would never forget. Up against her skirts cowered what was a mere bundle of nerves—her nurse, Mistress Leake. The unfortunate woman was scarce conscious: she lay motionless with her hood drawn tightly over her face, her hands held over her ears to shut out the hideous sounds. For an hour and more those two women sheltered there, while mounted men and maddened, riderless horses flew past, and men and women ran shrieking by, whilst all around them accoutrements, belts, arms, casques, were flung about recklessly by that wild horde of pigeon-hearted rabble, eager to cast aside everything and anything that might hinder this headlong flight. At one moment Barbara felt a heavy crash on her

shoulder; the pain was intolerable; a deadly nausea seized her; this grisly world seemed suddenly to recede from her, to veil itself in a murky mist, and then to fade away altogether.

CHAPTER VI

Thou Shalt Not Kill

§ 1

WHEN Barbara once more regained full consciousness the worst of the panic and of the awful reprisals it brought in its train were over. Farndon Fields lay silent under the warm noonday sun; it appeared deserted save perhaps for the dead. Barbara still felt very sick and giddy: her head ached furiously and she was conscious of a numb pain on her shoulder and down her left arm. She felt as if she were waking out of a dream. Several minutes went by ere she was able to move, but after a while she made a great effort to collect her scattered wits; then she looked about her. Mistress Leake was still crouching beside her, apparently senseless, and close to her hand lay a pistol which must have hit her as it fell. She crawled out of the ditch, and on hands and knees crept underneath one of the sheltering wagons and peeped about her: an abomination of desolation met her gaze; before her a mass of heaped-up accoutrements, derelict wagons, here and there a rigid figure lying prone upon the ground; overhead a flight of rooks that sent their melancholy call through the air; as far as the eye could reach not a sign of the flying army, not a sign of the pur-

suing horde. Far away the rising Avon gurgled and rippled in its cradle; England, beautiful rural England, spread before Barbara's gaze, her green mantle serene, peaceful, even though smirched with the refuse of to-day's evil deeds.

Barbara crept out from beneath the sheltering wagon; she still was dazed with all she had seen, with all that she would never forget. The rigid forms that lay dotted about upon the field bore mute and awesome testimony to the reality of what had seemed like a ghastly nightmare, and now, as Barbara gazed around her, she saw amongst those silent forms stealthy figures gliding, ghoul-like—scavengers that rob the dead. She shuddered with horror—she who had seen so many horrors to-day.

Away on her left, in the far corner of the field, a coach with decorated panels and yellow wheels stood, abandoned, with the shafts pointing heavenwards. It was the King's coach. Barbara had seen it many times at Oxford, had even sat in it once when His Majesty honoured her by desiring her company. She gazed on it now in that vague, uncomprehending way which is so often the outcome of great perturbation of spirit and of riotous thoughts. Then slowly out of the vagueness something seemed as it were to detach itself, to assume importance and to obtrude itself upon her mental vision: it was still intangible and she felt that her mind could not seize it—mentally she groped for something, something that persistently eluded her, an idea, a recollection, a duty—something that must be done, something that must, MUST be remem-

bered. For the nonce she could remember nothing except the horrors of the past few hours. She looked about her, hoping that something would bring back to her memory that other something which was evading her. She even forced herself to watch for a while the furtive movements of one of those ghouls intent on robbing the dead, then her wandering gaze fixed itself upon a small group of mounted men, way across the fields, who were fast coming this way. By their plumed hats she knew them to be friends; they had their horses' heads turned almost in a straight line towards Farndon Fields, and anon she saw them crossing the narrow stream of the river Avon. Somehow the horsemen became associated in her mind with that Something which she ought to remember. She closed her eyes—thinking—trying to think—to remember.

Then all at once it all came back to her: the "Wheatsheaf Inn" at Daventry, the nook where she had remained concealed, the council of war, the talk of the officers after His Majesty had left the room, the King's cabinet, the King's letters, Sir Marmaduke Langdale's words: "There would be the devil and more to pay if His Majesty's correspondence fell into evil hands."

Why Barbara should suddenly have connected all this with the coach at the bottom of the field she did not know—was it intuition, divination, or a warning from God? All that she was conscious of was a dead certainty that the King's correspondence had been left in the derelict coach, even while

every man was flying for dear life and thinking of nothing except personal safety.

Just as this conviction forced itself upon her Barbara became aware of the dark figure of a man at the further end of the field who seemed to be making his way toward the coach—a man in a dark mantle which he kept closely wrapped around his shoulders, and a broad-brimmed hat that hid the upper part of his face. Memory was at work now, keen and swift, and in an instant travelled back to that other dark figure vaguely seen two evenings ago in the gloom of the window embrasure at Daventry; the stealthy movements, the velvet mask, and then the pistol levelled at her, her unaccountable escape, and the hand grasping the window-frame. The figure was, of a certainty, moving toward the coach and Barbara wrapped her dark cloak quickly around her and crept back into the ditch. She picked up the pistol which a while ago had hit her and, without looking to see if it were loaded or no, she started to creep along the hedge. The distance between her and the approaching figure was perhaps a couple of hundred yards and the coach stood about midway between them. What she would do when she came face to face with the villain she did not know, but when she thought of that she grasped the pistol more firmly and her fingers sought and found the trigger.

Then in an instant she came to a halt, with her back against the hedge. The man after a quick run had reached the coach; he pulled open the door and Barbara saw nothing of him for the moment

but his broad back leaning forward into the interior. If she ever had any doubt as to the miscreant's purpose it vanished at the sight. She was distant from him now less than twenty yards; without any hesitation she raised the pistol, took aim and fired. The man had been in the very act of turning, he had one foot on the ground, the other on the step of the coach, under his right arm he had a large and unwieldy box; the next fraction of a second he took one step backward, then with a half turn he fell full length face downwards on the ground; the box struck against the door of the coach and came down with a crash close beside him. The smoking pistol dropped from Barbara's nerveless hand; a cold sweat rose to the roots of her hair, she clung to the brambles behind her, wide-eyed and her teeth chattering. In the reverberation of the pistol shot a thousand unearthly voices seemed to be shrieking out at her: "Thou shalt not kill!"

The sharp report had disturbed the ghoulish vampires in their grisly work; they rose from their fiendish task and scattered like a flock of starlings, seeking cover until danger was past. A moment's tense silence followed. Barbara pulled herself together with a mighty effort of will. She staggered forward, and with knees shaking so that she nearly fell at every step she came near to the box which lay some half dozen paces from the dark figure stretched full length on the ground. Stooping, she lifted the box and hid it underneath her mantle. Her eyes, despite her will, wandered back, and back again, to that dark immobile figure partly wrapped

in a mantle of coarse grey woollen stuff on which in the region of the shoulders a dull red stain was slowly spreading. The face was buried in the mud of the field and close by lay the broad-brimmed hat where it had rolled away; beside it Barbara spied a small black object which she recognised as a velvet mask. One arm, the right, was doubled up under the figure, but the left was outstretched, palm downwards and fingers outspread. On this hand Barbara's gaze hung, fascinated; something impelled her to look at it closer, and like a small animal drawn by the compelling eyes of a snake, so she crept along, making a wide detour around the prone figure, then drawing nearer to a point from whence she could see the hand. She stooped to look at it closer and the next moment a cry of horror was smothered in her throat: on the back of the hand she had seen quite clearly the mark of a scar, two jagged lines that shone, ivory-white, against the sunburnt flesh. She had known all along that the scar would be there, yet now, when she saw it, it seemed as if the earth could hold no greater abomination—and all about her the scene at once appeared more lonesome, more weird and spectral, peopled with a thousand ghosts out of the past scarce less fiendish than those conjured up by the hideous present. She had killed a man and that man was— Here it was that her mind came as it were to a halt. The conclusion was too horrible to contemplate, and a sickening nausea nearly caused Barbara to fall staggering backwards. Fortunately the next few seconds brought to her

fast fading senses the near sound of horses' hoofs pawing the sodden earth. She had just sufficient strength to look up and saw half a dozen horsemen galloping straight towards her. They were the horsemen she had seen a while ago, with plumed hats on their heads and now she could distinguish a white badge on their sleeves—they were friends. She grasped the box tightly under her arm, then started to run as fast as she could to meet them. A moment or two later Squire Brent's lusty voice rang out across the silence of the fields:

"Gad! 'tis my Barbara! Heaven be praised!"

He dismounted, ran quickly to her and caught her in his arms.

"Heavens above, child," he exclaimed, "what has happened?"

Barbara tried to explain while they all crowded round her; she had remained concealed in a ditch while the army fled past her—then she had spied the King's coach and thought of his letters—

"But we heard a report," Squire Brent cried.

"Yes!" she said. "An evildoer was trying to filch the King's cabinet and I shot him."

She held out the box and the Squire took it from her.

"The King's cabinet, by gad!" he murmured, bewildered.

"You have saved the King's honour, Mistress," one of the others added.

They all plied her with questions and she did her best to reply. Fortunately no one thought of asking her how she came to know anything at all

about the cabinet; the danger of the King's correspondence being captured had been an ever-present one in the minds of his whole entourage, and Mistress Barbara knowing of it was naught to wonder at. But it certainly was an amazing thing, while every one believed that the cabinet must be lost and dwelt with dread on the thought of the King's letters falling into the hands of the Parliament, that it should have been she, Barbara Brent, a mere girl, who was the means of saving the royalist cause from so dire a disgrace.

"A modern Joan of Arc," the Squire said proudly.

He had been mortally anxious about her and now told her so, dwelling on the mental agony which he had endured when, finding his way after the awful cataclysm back to Papillon Hall, he had heard the disquieting news that Mistress Barbara had been gone since morning with no one in attendance but old Mistress Leake. Since then he had scoured the neighbourhood, aided by these kind friends: Sir John Wydvill, Squire Perewich, Sir Roger de Leyton and Mr. Brauncepath whom he forthwith presented to Mistress Barbara. "Thank God," he added piously, "that she was safe."

Then he remembered Mistress Leake, and two of the younger men volunteered to search for the old woman, who fortunately had been too scared to move and was promptly discovered and brought, shivering and quaking, back to the side of her young mistress.

The first matter to think on now was their own

safety and that of the King's correspondence; obviously none of these matters could be discussed at length in the open field, more especially as the rain which had held up since morning now once more began to come down, nor was Barbara in a mental or physical condition to stand further strain; the cerebral excitement of the past few hours was a severe tax upon her, and moreover she had not tasted food or drink since she left Papillon Hall in the early dawn.

Encouraged by the Squire, she now mounted his horse behind him, whilst Mistress Leake was hoisted up into the saddle of one of the other gentlemen.

"We'll ride in the direction of Banbury," Squire Brent said, "and mayhap we'll find a wayside tavern where the people are not too scared to give us food and drink. There we can rest and talk. We shall then be well in the rear of the armies and will e'en leave all stragglers and other muckworms behind us."

He owned that his objective could not now be Stoke Lark. The whole of Gloucestershire and all but a fraction of Warwickshire were in the hands of the Parliamentarians and the Squire was in no doubt that "that canting, damned traitor Fairfax was even at this moment holding high revels or droning Psalms in the dining-hall of Stoke Lark."

"But," he added with bitter vindictiveness which was quite unlike his usual cheery self, "Broughton Castle is still in our hands, and it is your property, Babs, by virtue of that fool of a husband of yours.

You may as well derive some advantage from bearing his dishonoured name. It will be a safe place for you and incidentally a safe receptacle for the King's correspondence, until such time as the King himself do relieve us of the trust."

In the meanwhile he and his friends had already turned their horses' heads toward the south: Squire Brent with Barbara on the saddle behind him leading the way, and Mr. Brauncepath with Mistress Leake clinging desperately to him bringing up the rear. Thus the little cavalcade was set in motion and came two or three minutes later in the neighbourhood of the King's coach. Already Barbara's straining eyes had searched the ground for the dark prone figure with the face buried in the mud and the tell-tale hand outstretched.

"Where is that abominable reprobate, Babs?" the Squire asked. "'Tis well you rid the world of such refuse."

But Barbara searched the ground in vain, and though the Squire reined in his horse and his friends gathered around him, eager for a sight of the man who had paid for his knavery with his life, the mute witness of Mistress Barbara's prowess was nowhere to be seen.

BOOK III: *The Aftermath*

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CHAPTER I

The Spell of Broughton

§ 1

A GARRISON of five and twenty officers and men of the King's army was stationed at Broughton Castle. The soldiers were quartered in the huge loft under the roof where Cromwell's cavalry had slept the night before Edge Hill. They were rather a riotous crowd, fond of singing and of good cheer, who accepted Naseby as a royalist victory and spoke triumphantly of the speedy final overthrow of that lot of rough chaw-bacons who did not know one end of a fire-lock from another and thought more of Psalm singing than of drilling their recruits.

Barbara and the Squire occupied the rooms that gave on the great gallery on the North side of the Castle; here they were waited on by some of Squire Brent's own servants, who had fled from Stoke Lark at the approach of the Parliamentary army and made their way into Oxford; from thence Squire Brent had despatched them to Broughton. The officers commanding the little garrison would often

join the Squire and Mistress Barbara at supper, and then, in the evenings, she would sing to them, accompanying herself upon the viol; but when she and the Squire were by themselves he would ask her to read to him extracts from Mr. Edmund Spenser's *"Faërie Queene"* or from Mister Milton's recently published *"Masque of Comus,"* for the Squire prided himself upon his culture and his love of poetry, a love which he had striven to inculcate into the beloved child of his adoption. True that while Barbara read the worthy man would often fall asleep, only waking when the sound of her voice ceased to make accompaniment to his slumbers, when he would beg her to continue reading the poetry which he so greatly enjoyed. Ofttimes, however, Squire Brent was absent from Broughton, when he was away on business for the King—business which consisted for the most part in selling or pawning his last belongings for the benefit of the cause which he had so much at heart. His land in Gloucestershire and Warwickshire he had mortgaged up to the hilt, his gold and silver plate from Stoke Lark he had melted down; he had sold not only his late wife's jewels, but also those which he had given to Barbara from time to time; he had mortgaged his rents and disposed of his share in the wool business, which had been his late wife's marriage portion, for the sum of £10,000; and this too had gone into the King's coffers. All that he and Barbara had now to subsist on was an occasional loan from his late wife's relations, worthy people who kept aloof from the great conflict and

cared nought if the King won or his Parliament, so long as the price of wool kept up and they themselves were not called upon to provide money for either party.

The King's cabinet, which was a secret trust, was now safely stowed away in what was known as the Council Chamber, the very room in which those traitors Pym, Cromwell and Hampden had planned their rebellion against the King's Majesty which had culminated in the disaster of Naseby. It was situated at the top of the west staircase and enclosed by three outside walls, being safe against prying eyes and ears, for only one narrow door gave access to it from the stairs, and here four soldiers were kept on guard day and night, whilst its two windows, one facing south and the other west, looked down the grim, grey walls at a sheer height of sixty feet to the ground, walls clear of ivy, on which a cat, or mayhap a sleepwalker, could alone find a foothold.

Indeed every one in the castle was alive to the importance of the King's correspondence. His Majesty had been very injudicious and hasty when he wrote to the Duke of Lorraine and asked him to send foreign troops over to help quell the rebellion in England; he had also acted most unwisely when he made wild promises to the Irish Catholics with a view to raising a substantial Irish army. It was not for any mere subject to pass judgment on the King's Majesty, but if that correspondence was made public the people of England would no doubt put the very worst construction on the King's efforts

to subdue his rebellious subjects and the King's cause would greatly suffer thereby.

§ 2

For Barbara to return to Broughton Castle had been a painful experience. The place held a thousand associations for her: memories of her childhood, of the time when there was nothing in her life to mar the enjoyment of the present by remembrances of the past and terrors of the future. Broughton Castle, just as much as Stoke Lark, meant the happy, thoughtless past, its stately grey walls spoke of nothing but joy, of the innocent joys of childhood, of games of hide-and-seek in and out of the labyrinthine passages, down the broad gallery and through the stately halls; every corner held in it a memory, every room contained a fraction of her heart: the stable yard where she fell from her pony, the schoolroom where she had the quarrel with Nathaniel, the cupboard wherein she and John were trapped whilst hiding, the edge of the moat where she used to fish with Jim, the old kennel where Dina was born, the big elm-tree where they found the larder of the butcher-bird, she and Jim. Jim! Always Jim! Somehow his personality obtruded itself upon her mind more insistently than anything else. She fell to wondering vaguely what had become of him—her husband, strange as the word seemed when her lips unconsciously murmured it. Her husband! And she had hardly thought of him these few years past!

It was the spell of Broughton that was on her, no doubt; and when she wandered by the banks of the moat and watched the fitful play of the dragon flies' iridescent wings or gazed, dreaming, into the wide-open corollas of the water-lilies, it was of Jim she thought; it was his voice that spoke from amidst the reeds; she thought to see him peering down on her from the battlemented roofs over which he loved to climb; and round every corner of the stately pile, round every angle of every hedge she thought to come face to face with Jim. Jim, her one-time playmate! How she had hated him since! She had hated him on her wedding day when he had kissed her—against her will and for the first and last time. She had hated him too when first he had proclaimed himself a traitor, and when Squire Brent, but for her interference, would have killed him where he stood. Since then that hatred had lain dormant as far as Jim was concerned; she had scarcely thought about him at all until she came to Broughton. It was of Tubal that she had thought of late; Tubal who had won her childish affections to an extent that Jim had never succeeded in doing; Tubal had been her hero, her ideal, when Jim had only been a not always pleasant and often dictatorial playfellow. Tubal who had sworn that he would sooner give up life itself than foreswear his love for her. And Tubal had sunk to this, to the lowest, meanest calling upon earth, that of a spy! Tubal a spy, a sneak, a thing that any man, any menial could shoot at sight and glory in the act, a thing that would defile a hangman's rope! Tubal?

—What had happened to him since that hour when he fell in the mud of the fields, struck by her hand? She could not get to hear anything definite, although from a few chance words gathered here and there she understood that he was living at Shutford with his mother. This gave her a great sense of relief; the ghostly voices that were wont to torture her o' nights with cries of "Thou shalt not kill" could now be silenced forever. She had not killed Tubal —wounded him perhaps, and while she parleyed with the Squire and the other officers he had contrived to crawl into shelter, and since then he had made his way back to his own home; nor could the wound which she had inflicted on him have been very severe, as from all accounts young Longshankes was seen here and yonder, transacting his own business. Well, the pistol had not carried, and her hand was innocent of a fellow-creature's blood; and that was well too, even though that fellow-creature was more vile than an unreasoning beast.

But Tubal! . . . She could not understand it all. And when, feeling rather restless within the confines of Broughton Castle, she rode out sometimes as far as Shutford, she would gaze from afar upon the old Manor House as if she would wrest from it the secrets which it hid. Then one day she heard Tubal spoken of at supper by Squire Brent and the officers of the garrison. The Squire had come over from Oxford with a commission to requisition hay from the farmers around and spoke of Longshankes' devices for keeping his own stock concealed.

"You should have heard," he said, "the oaths the

young rogue let fly when I and my men took his hidden treasure from him. Every cartload of hay was as if it were a tooth drawn out of his sore gums. He had thought himself mighty clever to have stacked the hay in the Row-Barrow woods nearly a mile from his house; and you should have seen him—how he at first denied all possession of any hay. His crops, he said, had been entirely ruined by the rains. Then he tried to drive a hard bargain with me under pretence that he knew of some hay which he would sell me at a pound a ton. This confirmed my suspicions. I knew the rogue was lying."

"Marry," Captain Levell assented, "that young Longshankes is as precious a rascal as I ever wish to see. He began by proclaiming himself a neutral and hath since made a colossal fortune by cheating either side."

"By selling information to either side," Colonel Scrope added with an oath. "The varlet came to me but a while ago offering to deliver one of Saye and Sele's sons into our hands—James, the eldest. It seems that he was lying seriously ill at a cottage somewhere near Shutford; the rascal Longshankes got to hear of it and saw a means of earning a few pounds. Naturally I . . ."

Vigorously kicked on the shins by his brother officer, Colonel Scrope paused, puzzled at first; then a glance at Mistress Barbara brought back the recollection of her marriage to James Fiennes, the very man of whom he was speaking—a matter which most of her friends and many acquaintances were

wont to forget. He was profuse in his apologies.

"Nay, my good Scrope," the Squire broke in lustily, "Mistress Barbara will forgive you. She too is at pains to forget that unfortunate marriage which happier times we hope will soon see dissolved. If any of those rascally Fiennes be shot or hung 'tis neither she nor I who would complain. What say you, Babs?"

"That, in a woman's humble judgment, 'tis not well to traffic with such infamous varlets as Tubal Longshankes," Barbara replied coldly. "When last I saw him 'twas in Farndon Fields; he was trying then to steal the King's cabinet in order to sell it to General Fairfax, no doubt."

"How did you know?" the Colonel exclaimed.

"'Tis the first I heard of it," the Squire added with a frown.

"I knew him by a scar upon his hand. Two days before that he sneaked into the "Wheatsheaf Inn" at Daventry in order to steal the secrets of His Majesty's Council of War. I did not speak of this before," Barbara continued coolly and turned to the Squire, "because I was not sure and feared to accuse an innocent man. But now I have no doubt. The same man who would sell a one-time friend for money, when that friend lies sick, is capable of the most ignoble deeds, of cheating both sides, of lying to both, of betraying both; he is a thief, a traitor and an assassin, and to traffic with such a knave is to render oneself as ignoble as he."

The Squire shrugged his shoulders, none too well pleased.

"Woman's logic," he murmured.

But the Colonel rejoined lightly.

"By Gad, Mistress," he exclaimed, "'tis tersely put and in truth the fellow is naught but a muck-worm. Why—would you believe it?—when the army was at Daventry that knave, young Long-shankes, actually sold forty horses to Prince Rupert, which, it afterwards transpired, he had actually stolen from our own troops in the west less than ten days before. I am not astonished that he adds spying to his other unavowable transactions. Of course to traffic with such a man is always danger-ous as you, Mistress, have rightly said; but what will you?" he added with a careless shrug of the shoulders. "Everything is fair in war. We take our luck where we find it, and a Fiennes as hostage in our hands would be valuable, now that those rebels have captured so many of our men after Naseby."

"We could have sent his head to Fairfax as a warning, after the good old fashion of our fore-bears. 'Twas a mighty sound custom," Captain Lovell rejoined.

"Then why did you not do it?" the Squire queried roughly.

"For the simple reason that when we searched the cottage Langshankes told us of the Fiennes bird had flown away."

"You did not get him?" Barbara asked a little breathlessly.

"No. But we will," the Colonel asserted. "I am keeping in touch with that rascal Tubal. I have

a mind that he contrived the momentary evasion of Fiennes so as to set a higher price upon his ultimate surrender. Anyway I'll see what terms we can make with him."

"You would not—" Barbara exclaimed involuntarily and with such heat that the Squire loked up at her in astonishment, whereupon she went on more quietly: "You would not, I imagine, demean yourselves by killing a defenceless enemy?"

"Why not?" the Colonel retorted coolly.

"Why not forsooth?" the Squire assented. "'Twere the best way to set you free, my Babs, but 'tis a case of first catch your hare. Longshankes was probably lying when he said that Jim Fiennes was in hiding and after to-day 'tis doubtful if he will come nigh us again."

"How so?" the Colonel asked.

"When he refused to tell me where he had hidden his hay I had him flogged until he spoke." Then as Barbara uttered a cry of horror he added genially: "Your pardon, my wench, but these are times of war and if you do not treat a rascal as he deserves he will get the better of you."

"Anyway you have the hay," Captain Lovell concluded with a laugh.

"I have the hay, and Longshankes will think twice in future before he denies the King his dues."

"Nor will he deny himself a sound bargain over the Fiennes bird just because his back happens to be sore."

"Take care, sirs," Barbara put in stoutly. "My lord Essex hath vowed that for every Parliamen-

tarian put to death he would execute three of our men."

"A Fiennes is worth three of our rascals," the Colonel concluded cynically. "We can always hang him and then wait and see what happens."

CHAPTER II

Blood Money

§ 1

THAT night Barbara lay awake until the small hours of the morning.

She could not get out of her mind the picture of Jim lying sick and of Tubal taking blood money for selling him to his enemies. These times made every man callous and cold-hearted she knew, and even the dear Squire, who in normal days had been the kindliest of men, seemed now turned into a heartless, almost brutal fratricide; but there was something so awful in the cynicism which would enter into a bargain for the betrayal and murder of a sick man—and a sick man who had once been a friend—that Barbara's whole soul revolted at the thought, even though she had no manner of love for Jim. In very truth that was the greatest horror of this war, that it was oft a brother's hand that was raised against his brother, a friend against his friend, even a son against his father. Of all the terrible calamities which the passions of men have brought upon this earth there are none to compare with the horrors of civil war: the feeling of hatred is ten thousand times more bitter because the enemy was once a friend and because the hands that are raised against one another were once fondly clasped

in amity; it is ten thousand times more deadly because of the past which it recalls, because of the thousand and one little memories of love and companionship, of dangers and pleasures shared, memories which rise up like a horde of devils breathing a blind and insatiable revenge.

To Barbara it seemed that night as if the darkness was peopled with those devils and with sighs and moans from spectral figures risen from out the past. She vainly tried to close her eyes against the insistent picture of her whilom playmate lying sick and helpless whilst the other, Iscariot-like, counted the thirty pieces of silver, the price of his friend's blood. And she vainly tried to shut her ears against the persistent echo of the Squire's callous laugh and Colonel Scrope's harsh voice saying with cold-blooded cynicism: "We can always hang him and then wait and see what happens."

So persistent were these night visions that, unable to sleep, she rose from her bed; slipping on a cloak and hood and thrusting her feet into her shoes, she threw open the casement window and looked out into the night. The rose garden was down below, enclosed by tall sombre yew hedges, and beyond these the water of the moat lay dark and motionless, half concealed beneath a canopy of water-lily leaves. And while she stood there by the open casement the waning moon, serene and mysterious, peeped out for a moment through a rent in her veil of clouds; just for a few seconds the landscape stood revealed in a strange, shadowless light, the water glistened with a thousand little

rills and every water-lily leaf became a mirror that reflected the pale, wan moon. A perfume of dying roses ascended to Barbara's nostrils, and from some hidden grass-covered nook beside the moat there rose the sweet, sad call of a moor-hen in distress. Barbara remained quite still; the beauty of the night, the charm of its mystery and of its peace held her enthralled. She looked down upon the garden where every rose looked like a wraith, colourless and pellucid, and the yews a black army of ghouls guarding the precincts of this abode of ghosts. And while she looked it suddenly seemed to her as if a pair of eyes were looking straight at her out of that spectral garden: some spirit, perhaps more restless than her own, had sought the solitude of the night and was finding peace in the loneliness and mystery of this hour before the dawn. That was Barbara's first thought, for she was not in the least alarmed; she leaned out of the window, trying to distinguish what sort of spirit it might be; but the next moment she became aware of something dark and furtive that moved swiftly along under the shelter of the yews. A few seconds later, past the angle of the hedge, the moon threw into vague relief a dark form wrapped in a mantle, the head hidden beneath a broad-brimmed hat, hurrying toward the moat. It was but a vision, for in that instant a bank of clouds once more hid the face of the moon, the night swallowed up the stealthy figure and Barbara saw nothing more; but anon her straining ears caught the sound of a splash and then of measured strokes ploughing the surface of the

moat. It had all been so quick, so sudden and so mysterious that for the moment Barbara thought that she had imagined the whole thing, that it was just her fancy that had peopled a spirit landscape with a furtive haunting ghost, born of the darkness and since returned to the spectral bosom that gave it birth.

But standing there, reflecting and revisualising what she had seen, something in the vague, stealthy figure presented itself to her mind as familiar, as something that she had seen before; and she was suddenly conscious of a sense of alarm. She closed and latched the casement and crept across the room to the door, listening for a while ere she turned the key in the lock. Then she opened the door and peeped out; the long gallery was in total darkness, save at the far end where, at the top of the stairs, the sentry was on the watch; here a feeble ray of light crept in around the corner and Barbara's keen ears caught the sound of murmured conversation, the creaking of leather jerkins and faint click of steel. Reassured she once more closed and locked the door, and presently went back to bed.

§ 2

It was only in the early dawn that Barbara fell at last into a troubled sleep, but as soon as the morning sun came peeping in through the curtains she awoke once more—this time with a purpose. The incident of the night had for the time being chased away the horrible thought of Tubal's treach-

ery and of Jim's desperate plight, but the morning light relegated the incident into the background: Tubal, the spy, disappeared behind Tubal, the informer. Whilst she broke her fast in company of the Squire she told him what she had seen in the night and he promised that a guard should in future be placed beneath the windows on that side of the castle in addition to the one on the north side. Later on Squire Brent rode away on business of his own, and Barbara, with a long afternoon before her, ran down to the stables and demanded that a horse be saddled for her.

Then she sallied forth escorted by Matthew.

She was going to Shutford to speak with Tubal. What she would say to him when she saw him she did not know, but it would surely be something to stay his fratricidal hand. She felt that at all costs she must prevent that awful deed from being committed: Tubal selling Jim to men who meant to kill him. No cause could be served by such a monstrous deed, and by trying to prevent it she was not betraying her King.

At Shutford 'twas Mistress Longshankes who met her when she dismounted—Mistress Longshankes, amiable, almost obsequious, who ushered her into the parlour and enquired after Squire Brent's health and Mistress Barbara's welfare in the same gentle tones she was wont to use in the dim past, before the war made her a rich woman and Barbara a poor one. She drew a chair for Barbara beside the window and in response to a curt enquiry after Tubal she went to fetch her son.

Save for that dim, weird outline of him at Daventry and again at Farndon Fields, Barbara had not seen Tubal for more than five years. She thought him very much altered, coarser of feature and more slouchy of manner. But then she had been a mere child in the days when Tubal paid her ardent courtship, and the love which he professed for her in those days had no doubt idealised him in her sight.

He strolled in now, with his hands in his breeches pockets; his hair was all tousled about his head, and his whole appearance gave the impression that he did not set great store by personal cleanliness. On the other hand, there was a distinct attempt on his part, as he entered, to appear at ease, even to swagger, in the presence of the lady before whom he was wont to affect the sweet humility of a lover.

"Well, Babs," he said jauntily, as he came to a halt in front of her, standing with legs wide apart and not attempting to take his hands out of his pockets, "'twas passing amiable of you to come and see us. We've been wondering if you had grown too proud to recognise old friends."

"It were not for me, Tubal," Barbara replied coldly, "to turn my back on my friends. Rather must you look to yourself for any cause of estrangement between us."

She was conscious of a feeling that amounted to repulsion. When she started out this morning she had no idea that the interview would be so difficult; she had acted on impulse. In her mind right up to this moment there had always been two Tubals, the lover of her childhood and the

spy of Daventry and Farndon Fields; somehow these two personalities were never merged in her mind until now.

But here face to face with him she only saw Tubal as he was, coarse, brutal, an informer, something that she despised so utterly that she could hardly bear the sight of him. She not only saw him as the miscreant with the mask on his face trying to steal the secrets of the King's council, but she could not help picturing him under the lash of the Squire's soldiery, whipped like a dog. He, Tubal, who had made love to her once! And it was to him that she had come with a prayer on her lips. The enormity of the task which she had undertaken held her paralysed for a moment, and she had need of all her courage to speak dispassionately.

She was sitting in a high-backed chair beside the window that gave on the little flagged garden that was wont to be so gay with roses in June, but which somehow now looked uncared for, untrimmed, the paths unsightly with weeds. Tubal had thrown himself into a chair in front of her and sat there sprawling with his long legs stretched out before him. He looked sullen and glowering; somehow he seemed to be divining her thoughts, for suddenly he said without preamble:

"The Squire had me flogged by his varlets the other day," he began drily. "Did you know it?"

Then, as she made no reply, he went on roughly: "And do you know why? Because I would not submit to being robbed of what I had earned by the

sweat of my brow; because I demanded just payment for what was mine own he had me flogged, flogged like a cur, until my flesh was torn from my bones, and, unable to endure the pain any longer, I gave way to his brutality and his rapaciousness. Look, wench," he added and with a savage gesture he tore at his neck band and pushed back his jerkin and shirt from his shoulder: the flesh showed livid and scarlet with purple weals. "Look!" he cried.

"Tubal!" she cried loudly in protest.

He waited for a moment in silence, then he broke into a harsh laugh whilst he deliberately readjusted his collar and jerkin.

"I only wished you to know, my wench," he said slowly, "that if you have come here to ask for favours or to cry poverty you have come to the wrong man."

"You entirely mistake me, Tubal," Barbara retorted coldly. "I was not like to come and ask a favour of you. What has passed between you and Squire Brent is none of my doing, and I would, of a certainty, never have come nigh you again as long as I lived, as you may well think—not after that incident at Daventry, when I was neither blind nor a dolt. And if I am here now it is because I am determined to expend the last breath in my body, if need be, to prevent your committing the hideous crime that you are contemplating."

For a while he looked at her with wide, staring eyes as if he did not altogether grasp her meaning. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Hoity toity!" he cried. "What a grand lady

to be sure, and in the name of Belial what is all this about? My business in Daventry was my business, and I fail to see in what way it concerns your ladyship; and may I go to eternal perdition if I understand what you mean by 'hideous crime' and 'expending the last breath' in your comely body. If you contemplate the latter on my behalf, then I pray you spare your pains."

"You understand quite well what I mean, Tubal. With regard to Daventry and—and again Farndon, 'tis as you say a matter between you and your conscience, and 'tis only my loyalty to our King that makes me hate you for what you did then. I pray you let me speak," she went on more rapidly, seeing that he had made a movement as if he would protest again. "What I have come to say is difficult enough and I need all my strength and all the help that God will give me to put the matter clearly before you. Tubal!" she said with solemn earnestness, "I have come in order to speak to you about Jim."

"Jim!" he exclaimed, and a hot flush at once spread all over his face.

"Yes, Jim. They tell me he is sick. I have not seen him. But they also tell me that you, Tubal, have offered to disclose his whereabouts to Colonel Scrope over at the Castle."

"What if I have?" Tubal retorted gruffly.

"Only this. That if Colonel Scrope gets Jim he will have him hanged."

"Or flogged, eh, as your Squire had me flogged?"

"Tubal!"

"Eh, what? Jim Fiennes' shoulders are not more immune than mine against the brutality of your friends."

"There are good men and bad men on both sides, Tubal; but we have, alas! come to a time in our dear, unfortunate country when all reason, all humanity has died out of men's hearts. We have been fighting against one another for so long and so desperately that it seems as if most of us have wholly forgotten the teachings of God."

"Squire Brent hath seen to it that I at least shall forget nothing."

"'Tis not for Squire Brent that I plead, Tubal, nor yet for forgetfulness. I have come here to entreat you in the name of humanity, in the name of our childhood, to leave Jim Fiennes in peace."

"I am leaving Jim Fiennes in peace," Tubal retorted with a coarse laugh. "'Tis Colonel Scrope who won't leave him thus—when he gets him."

"Tubal!"

"Eh, what? Jim Fiennes is nothing to me; and suppose I say that I desire to render the King's cause—your cause, my pretty—a service by giving up a traitor to justice?"

"No cause can be served by such treachery," she replied; "and you know well, Tubal, that what you seek for is money, not justice. Money," she went on with withering scorn. "Bah! One man who sold his friend hanged himself for shame."

"I'll not hang myself I promise you," Tubal rejoined with a flippant laugh. "As for Jim he is not my friend."

"He is a man, sick and in distress. He was your playmate once."

"And so were you my playmate, you, Squire Brent's beloved daughter, and yet he had me thrashed, worse than a lacquey, worse than a dog. No, my wench; friendship hath become a poor thing these days. Let every man look to his own pocket I say, and devil a bit let him care for anything else."

"But 'tis not Squire Brent who pleads to you, Tubal," she insisted, waxing more desperate as he grew more sullen and obstinate. "It is I."

"You, I know!" he rejoined with a sneer. "You come here and plead for Jim and I say to you: 'If I leave Jim alone what will you do for me?' "

She frowned, puzzled for the moment.

"I, Tubal? What can I do?"

"Yes, you! Will you bring Squire Brent here to sue for my pardon on bended knees for the flogging he gave me? Will you do that, I say. For then I might think on it and leave Jim Fiennes alone if it pleases you."

"You know well, Tubal, that that is impossible."

"That is just it," he retorted savagely. "It is impossible as you say for a grand gentleman to sue pardon for an outrage done to a defenceless man, and yet you come here and propose that I should forfeit an excellent bargain over a man who is nothing to me. Why the devil should I?"

"Why should you?" she rejoined with growing vehemence. "Why should you? Oh, think, Tubal, think! Jim Fiennes was your playmate once, your

friend; now he is sick and in trouble, and you talk of selling him for a few pounds, like Judas Iscariot sold our Lord."

"Jim Fiennes never was my friend," Tubal retorted cynically. "He was my successful rival in your affections."

"That is foolishness, Tubal, and you know it. Our parents plighted our troth to one another, and I was truly fond of you once."

"Once? No longer?" he queried with a sardonic grin.

Barbara ignored the question and reiterated more insistently, with a tragic note of desperate anxiety in her voice:

"Jim Fiennes never harmed you, Tubal. Why should you wish to see him dead?"

"Tshaw! You talk in heroics, Mistress. Jim Fiennes is naught to me."

"And you mean to sell him? He is sick, defenceless, and you mean to sell him?"

"So was I defenceless yesterday!" Tubal declared carelessly with a shrug of his shoulders. "The fortunes of war, Mistress!"

"Tubal!" she cried, hot with indignation.

"Eh, what?" he went on and, rising from his chair, started to pace up and down the room. "What is Jim Fiennes to you, I would wish to know. If folk speak correctly you only wait to see the end of strife in order to send him packing. Why should you all of a sudden evince such interest in him that you come here—here—to the house of a man whom you deem less than a dog—for you

would never thrash a dog—in order to expend, as you say, the last breath in your body to plead for him? Why, I say?"

"Because I cannot altogether forget, Tubal, that you and I and Jim were playmates once, that we went fishing together, bird's-nesting, roaming about the woods, and played hide-and-seek together at Broughton Castle; because we were happy together, were scolded together, laughed and cried together. Because such a crime as you contemplate now would forever pollute for me the earth on which you tread, the air which you breathe, and I should never know a happy hour again."

While she thus spoke, departing unconsciously from her self-imposed reserve, and pleading with ever-increasing passion, Tubal had come to a halt beside her chair, his eyes dwelling with cynical pleasure on the beautiful picture she presented in her worn but still elegant riding habit of dark green velvet, with the muslin collar outlining her exquisite throat; she sat with one knee crossed over the other, and beneath her gown peeped the toe of her tiny foot; her hands, encased in leather gloves elaborately embroidered, held her riding whip tightly about her knee. Her small head appeared almost radiant with youth and brilliance of colouring against the sombre background of the chair; and the morning sunlight, slanting in through the window, glinted on the delicate gold of her hair and outlined the noble profile, the slender, straight neck and the rise of the plump shoulders with a narrow golden line of light. And now when she had fin-

ished speaking and turned those grey, mysterious eyes of hers, filled with unshed tears up to him, a cry of admiration came through his full sensual lips.

"By my soul!" he exclaimed and stood before her, with hands in pockets, his head on one side eyeing her with cynical pleasure. "By my soul, you have grown into a fine piece of goods, Mistress, and I've a mind—"

Then as with burning indignation guessing his purpose, ere he had uttered it, Barbara jumped up from her chair, shamed and indignant. He came a step or two nearer to her and went on with a hoarse laugh.

"Yes, I have a mind to yield to your pretty pleading, Mistress, for I'm only a man and I cannot altogether forget that even as a child you knew how to kiss. Oh," he added with a sneer, "'tis no use putting on the airs and graces of a fine lady now. You have come to plead, you cannot go back on that. You have come to plead and I find you so desirable that I'm willing to bargain with you. I'll promise you anything, my wench"—and suddenly he threw out his arms and clasped her round the shoulders—"anything if you'll kiss me as you used to do in the days of which you talk so fondly. What do you want me to do?" he went on, holding her so tightly that for the moment she could not even struggle. "I'll do whatever it be."

"You are mad, Tubal," she said, controlling her voice as best she could and straining against his arms in a desperate effort to free herself.

"That is as may be," he said in a slow, husky

whisper, "but you shall kiss me all the same, my pretty. You shall kiss me now; and then we'll let Jim Fiennes go to the devil in his own way. I shall have paid twenty pounds for that kiss, but, by gad! 'tis worth it. Kiss me, Babs!"

She was able for one instant to look him straight between the eyes, then she said with slow deliberation:

"I would as soon pick a snake out of the grass and kiss that as you!"

But her indignation only seemed to amuse him, for he laughed and said gaily:

"Kiss anything you like, but kiss me first, you little vixen. By gad—!"

The next words were smothered in his throat. In the clumsy efforts which he made to reach Barbara's lips with his own he must have relaxed his hold upon her, for she succeeded in wrenching herself free, and the next moment she had raised her hand, which still held the riding whip, and with it cut him violently across the face. He uttered a cry of rage and pain and staggered back dazed and blinded. When he had recovered sufficiently to look about him again Barbara had gone.

§ 3

She rode home with her thoughts in a turmoil—a turmoil in which bitter disappointment and indignation warred with self-reproach. Not only had she utterly failed to turn a villain's heart from a monstrous deed, but she had aroused a veritable storm

of evil passions in him—passions in which revenge and spite would no doubt become dominant. She had done nothing to save Jim, and Tubal would hate her now as much as he hated the Squire, and work against Jim with the added desire of hurting her. She wept tears of remorse for her hot-headed impulses, her want of self-control; she might, she felt now, even have kept the varlet in his place had she kept a stronger hold on her nerves; but she could not help shuddering at the recollection of that horrible scene. The fact that such a pariah had cast eyes on her, had dared to touch her, gave her in itself a sense of pollution as of proximity to something unclean.

But Barbara was not the woman to dwell long on her own troubles. Tubal had in her sight sunk to a depth so low that the mere thought of him had become a degradation. She swept Tubal out of her mind, as she would vermin, and turned her thoughts back to Jim. But why Jim? In truth she had to ask herself the question, for he was nothing to her; a wife only in name, she had looked forward to complete freedom as soon as these troublous times were past. Nevertheless she could not help but think of Jim, his helplessness, his sickness, and that execrable Tubal lurking in the background, striking an infamous bargain with Colonel Scrope and counting out the money paid to him for the betrayal. She had done her best to save Jim and she had failed. Could an abstract desire to right a wrong demand more of her? Probably not. Yet she could not rid herself of thoughts of Jim.

She felt infinitely sorry for him. Yes, that was it. She was sorry for him because he was sick and helpless and mayhap confided in the Judas who was betraying him. There was a vague, motherly feeling for him stirring unaccountably in her heart, a feeling from which no really good woman is ever quite free —the feeling of pity for what is weak, apart from any question of enmity, and an inherent desire to protect.

In the evening Barbara spoke on the matter again with Colonel Scrope. Squire Brent, being again absent from home, she felt that she could talk more freely. But the Colonel, though he listened quite sympathetically to her, put her off the main issue as if she were a child. These matters, he said, were too painful for women to discuss. Anyway there was nothing at present to trouble about, and she had best occupy her pretty head with more pleasant things. He himself had not seen Longshankes again, and no doubt that rascal Fiennes had left the neighbourhood by now.

He patted Barbara's hand, smiling benevolently, and made her feel like a child who has been told to run away and play. The Colonel promised her that he would do his best even should Jim fall in his hands, which was, he declared, most unlikely, but even as he made the promise Barbara feared that he did not mean to keep it. Men had lost all sense of humanity these days; they were fighting so desperately, hated one another so bitterly, that there was no room in their hearts for pity or gentleness.

CHAPTER III

Memories

§ 1

IT was on a warm afternoon in the last days of June that Barbara went wandering out into the Row-Barrow woods alone. She had been much alone the last few days, as the Squire now was more often away than not, Matthew sick and the company of Mistress Leake too irksome to be tolerated. For company she had her thoughts and Rex, the young cocker, successor in her affection to Dina, dead a year or two ago.

She wandered through a chestnut coppice, revelling in that perfect peace which is the peculiar attribute of woods and is made up of the thousand and one furtive sounds that give to the wanderer a delicious sense of isolation and of rest: the swish of last year's leaves, the crackling of tiny falling twigs, the sudden flutter of unseen wings, the call of birds and patter of tiny feet. Barbara was walking along a narrow track which abutted, down a very steep gradient, on the narrow lane that would lead her back to Broughton. On her left the coppice was unusually dense, like a wall of young growth covered with luscious, young leaf; on her right the ground fell sheer away down into what had once been a sand-pit and was now overgrown with shrub-

bery; she had to keep her wits about her and to walk warily, clinging to the twigs of the young chestnut beside her, for the track was narrow and the soil very dry, and oft, as she went along, clumps of earth gave way under her feet and rolled down into the pit below. From time to time she heard Rex's excited yapping whenever he discovered something to worry or to chase.

She felt her position to be a little precarious, and anon came to a halt. She was just thinking of turning back and finding some other less difficult track when a howl of distress from Rex glued her to the spot. She could just see the dog trying for a second or less to keep a foothold on the shifting ground, then with a final howl disappear in a cloud of dust down the precipitous incline. She gave a cry, and her first impulse was to run at once to the dog's rescue. But, peering down into the pit, her heart failed her, for the sides of the declivity had been hollowed out by the constantly alternating action of rain and drought, and the grass-grown edges, held together here and there by huge clumps of dead root, overhung the abyss in a manner that would have made the descent from this side if not impossible at any rate very dangerous. It was in fact a portion of that edge that had given way and had carried Rex along with it; and what made the situation more dangerous still was that at this same point an enormous clump of dead root with a considerable portion of tree-trunk still attached to it was slowly detaching itself from the loose soil and was threatening every moment to

crash down into the depth—probably on the top of Rex. It was the sight of this last great danger that had wrung a cry from Barbara, but she was even then measuring her chance of reaching her dog before the final catastrophe occurred, when she suddenly heard a peremptory cry to "Stand still!" and, looking up, she saw the figure of a man swiftly climbing to the crest of a young sapling that overhung at a sharp angle the edge of the pit. The sapling bent under his weight and presently he appeared clinging with both hands to its summit, suspended in mid-air sheer above the bottom, whilst Barbara, holding her breath, watched him spellbound. The next moment he let go and fell tumbling in the rough grass below. His movements were extraordinarily quick; already he had picked himself up and was running in the direction where Rex's dismal howls called pitifully for help. To pick up the dog was the work of a few seconds; the next moment there was a terrific crackling and a crashing, and the huge mass of root trunk and dead branches fell down into the depth, carrying with them half a ton of dry earth. Barbara closed her eyes, not daring to look. She had seen the man bending over the spot where Rex was lying; she had seen him pick up the dog; but a second later came the crash, and after that she saw nothing more. Now she felt physically sick; with both hands she clung to the young chestnut behind her, or she would surely have fallen forward. A few seconds went by, then she opened her eyes again. The man was climbing up the further declivity of the pit; he had

the dog in his arms, which no doubt hampered him, for his ascent was slow; he had only one hand to aid him in pulling himself up by the rough grass and scrub that covered the sandy soil.

But there was not the same difficulty on that side of the pit as there was on this: the slope was a comparatively easy one and the clump of scrub gave a certain measure of foothold. Barbara felt reassured; she started to go back the way she came, following the narrow track that would lead her to the head of the pit. For a while she lost sight of Rex and his rescuer when the track struck under the undergrowth, but anon she came to a clearing, and some two hundred yards away to her left she saw her unknown friend sitting at the foot of a large, isolated Scotch fir, with head bent, apparently intent on examining the dog. She stepped out more briskly, feeling genuinely grateful; but she had not gone more than a hundred yards when she came abruptly to a halt, feeling that her heart had given a sudden, startled jump. The man who was sitting there with Rex in his arms was Jim Fiennes; she knew him in a moment, although obviously he looked much older, thinner, altogether different than when she saw him last. The next moment he raised his head and of course saw her—must have recognised her too—but he made no attempt to rise, and calmly went on examining the dog's foot.

For a minute or more Barbara hesitated: the situation was in truth a delicate one; the man was her husband, and withal an enemy, an enemy to her King, her friends, the cause she had at heart; he

was a rebel, a traitor, whom men like Squire Brent and Colonel Scrope would shoot at sight, but he was also the rescuer of Rex—the rescuer at peril of his life. Just as on her wedding morning he had met a swarm of wasps in order to save Dina, so now he had risked a jump which might have resulted in a broken back. The picture of that morning rose vividly before Barbara's mind: Dina in distress, Tubal hurrying away and striving to drag her away with him, and then her glance back and seeing Jim running to the lake with Dina in his arms. She remembered it all as if it had happened yesterday; she even remembered how comical Jim looked with his head bobbing out of the water, and how cross he was with her because she had laughed. Afterwards he had been unkind about Dina, and thereby dried up the fountain of her gratitude.

It was a bit of her childhood that unfolded itself before Barbara's mental vision while she stood for the space of that one minute looking at Jim, a bit of that happy, careless past when no man was at enmity with his kindred, no man had yet raised his hand against his brother; and with it came the recollection of the peril in which Jim stood at the hands of that miserable informer, Tubal, and of the efforts which she had made in order to save him. That and a sense of gratitude for what he had just done for Rex spurred her on to shake off the sense of nervousness which kept her standing motionless like a wooden doll when she should be running straightway to Jim in order to thank him with a few kind and gracious words. A moment

or two later she had come to within ten paces of him, but he never looked up; he was busy with two sticks which he had whittled down until they were straight and smooth, and now he took a handkerchief from his pocket, and with the aid of his teeth tore a strip off it; then he proceeded to set Rex's leg between the sticks, securing them firmly with the strip of linen. Barbara did not dare come nearer; the operation was a delicate one, requiring infinite gentleness and no small skill. Rex lay in the fold of his left arm, gently whining, but looking up at him with that pathetic expression of trust only to be found in the eyes of a dog. Jim had not made the slightest movement toward her when she approached; she wondered if he knew that she was so nigh. In the meanwhile she could examine him at her leisure; he certainly looked older and very thin; his chestnut hair was cropped quite close to his head save over the temples, where Barbara recognised some of those unruly curls that were wont, when he was a lad, to tumble over his eyes. She thought his clothes looked shabby, as if they had been subjected to very hard wear, and the plain lawn collar and cuffs at his throat and wrists had suffered materially in freshness through his recent adventure. She also noticed now for the first time that he wore a black silk scarf tied round his neck as a sling, apparently for the arm which now encircled Rex, and also that there was a black bandage wound around his left hand.

At this point Rex, scenting his mistress, struggled vigorously, but Jim kept a tight hold of him. It

was only when the process of setting the leg was complete that, without any prelude and without attempting to move or to glance in Barbara's direction, he suddenly said:

"I think the little beast will be all right now, but I should not let him put his foot to the ground for at least a week."

Barbara gave a start; she had not realised that he had seen her. Her surprise placed her at a disadvantage; she felt suddenly shy and ill at ease. Not so Jim, who went on coolly:

"I wish you would take the dog from me, Mistress. I should be somewhat awkward getting up."

She came quickly nearer; he held Rex out to her and she took the dog from him.

"How can I thank you?" she began.

"There's no need for thanks," he rejoined drily. "I never could bear to see an animal in distress."

She busied herself for a moment or two fondling the dog, and when she looked up again Jim had struggled to his feet.

"The leg is broken," he said, "but it will get well soon, with care. Good day to you, Mistress—" And before she had time to say anything in reply he turned to go and was a dozen yards or more away before she regained the use of her tongue; then she cried out impulsively:

"Jim!"

At this he halted, appeared to hesitate for the fraction of a second, and finally half turned back towards her. "Your commands, Mistress?" he asked.

"You are not going away like that, Jim," Bar-

bara went on, feeling a little breathless, "after what you've done for Rex? If you won't let me thank you, at least will you not take my hand?"

He was standing quite still and looking at her with a half-vacant, astonished expression that struck her as pathetic. He certainly looked very wan, his eyes were circled and sunk and there was a curious look of pain that was not entirely physical about his lips.

"You have been ill," she said with real sympathy. "Are you better now?"

"I am well again, Mistress," he replied, "and thank you for your solicitude."

His manner was distinctly unresponsive and Barbara was at a loss to broach the subject which lay very near her heart. He had taken her hand and bent low over it, but she felt that he was all on wires, longing to get away. She had in truth need of all her courage to keep a tight hold on his hand when he so obviously wished to draw it back.

"There is something I wished to say to you, Jim," she said gently at last. "Do not, I pray you, make it too difficult for me. We are practically strangers to one another now, but there was a time . . ."

She looked straight into his face as she said this, and for the first time saw a quaint, whimsical expression creep into his eyes.

"Yes," he said, "there was a time once—but that is so long ago I had not thought you would remember."

"It is because I do remember," she insisted, "that I have for three days past longed to warn you."

"To warn me? Heavens above! Of what?"

"That your life in this neighbourhood is in jeopardy. There is a traitor—Tubal, you remember him?—who makes money by unavowable means—a miscreant whom God will punish—he has been to one of the officers of our garrison and offered to disclose your whereabouts—and I have been at my wit's end to know how to give you warning that you must go hence at once—it seems," she added quaintly, "as if Rex was the little instrument God chose that I might have the chance of speaking with you."

He let her go on without attempting to interrupt, and she looked in vain for traces of excitement or even interest on his face; it only expressed the same vague surprise of a while ago.

"'Tis I must thank you now, Mistress," he said when she paused, a little out of breath with emotion. "I do not know why I should have earned your solicitude."

"You will heed my warning?" she pleaded. "It is earnestly meant. A traitor is always a danger and Tubal hath neither scruples nor honour."

"He is after making money. These are hard times for every one."

"He is an execrable spy—"

"No doubt he thinks to serve his cause and takes his wares to the most likely markets."

"Nay, a man of that stamp would disgrace any cause. Had you no thought of his infamy?"

"More than a thought, fair Mistress," he replied with his whimsical smile. "I knew of it."

"And yet you stayed?"

"I was sick. I had nowhere to go."

"But surely your father—your brothers—"

"They are with the army—fighting—they have no use for me."

She looked at him quizzically for a moment or two.

"And you, Jim," she asked, "you are not fighting?"

"As you see," he replied curtly.

"Why not?"

"I have been sick."

"Wounded? At Naseby?"

"Yes. At Naseby."

He had relapsed into his uncommunicative mood, and she did not like to press him with questions, although she longed to ask him why he had been allowed to drift into this part of England which was under subjection to the King, whilst, alas! the neighbouring countries were all now in the hands of the Parliamentarians and would have afforded him safer shelter.

There was an awkward pause between them, and at last Barbara took hold of one of Rex's paws and playfully held it out.

"Well, Rex," she said, with a nervous little laugh, "say good-bye to the kind gentleman who has saved your worthless little life, and ask him in future to set more value on his own."

She felt very angry with herself because despite her pride the tears would gather in her eyes. It seemed so foolish to be sorry for a man who so

obviously did not desire her sympathy; but whilst she would have given the world to hide her tears from him, a tell-tale sob rose insistently to her throat. He looked so lonely, so forlorn, and vaguely she wondered what the tragedy was in his life that had brought those lines of care and suffering round his mouth and eyes. Jim had always been rather self-centred, unlike boys of his own age; he and his brothers had never been greatly in sympathy with one another, but now there was an expression in his face as of a man haunted. She was loath to leave him, yet had no excuse to stay: a world of divergent ideals, thoughts, aims and ambitions lay between them. What had she, a passionate devotee at the shrine of kingship, to say to this man who sided with the enemies of her King? Feeling by now was running so high between one party and the other that there was no crime, no villainy that either side would not attribute to its enemies, and Barbara felt that Jim, being a man, must hate her for the principles for which she stood, even though she, being a woman, had sacrificed much of her pride in order to warn him against the danger that threatened him. In truth, since he had not so much as uttered a "thank you," there was nothing more to say, nor did Barbara feel that she had complete control over her voice. So now she murmured a hasty "God guard you!" then grasping Rex close to her she turned and walked rapidly across the clearing, plunging as quickly as she could into the undergrowth so that she might the sooner be hidden from his view.

CHAPTER IV

The Bargain

§ 1

MATTHEW, good-natured, devoted old Matthew, had promised faithfully to look after Rex; for Rex would have been miserable in the house, being used to fresh air, the smell of the stables and the companionship of horses; so he had what Barbara called his day and night nursery, two kennels, one in a loose box inside the stables and the other in the yard, and Matthew most patiently carried him from one kennel to the other, according to weather conditions; Matthew also saw to it that Rex did not put his injured foot to the ground and that he was generally pampered and petted as his own mistress would have wished.

Barbara had given the dog in Matthew's care immediately on her return to the Castle after the dramatic adventure of the sand pit, and very early the following morning she was down in the stables, having brought something special along for Rex's breakfast. She felt tired and listless this morning —more so than usual: nerve-racking adventures during the day and insomnia during the night were beginning to tell on her vigorous young constitution; the pinch of poor and insufficient food was also difficult to endure, and with it all there was

the constant strain of responsibility for the King's letters and the equally constant dread of the sinister influence that she felt was still scheming and working for possession of the cabinet. It seemed strange to Barbara that Colonel Scrope and Squire Brent, men of good counsel and sound judgment, should allow an avowed spy and informer like Tubal Longshankes access to Broughton Castle; she had not perhaps realised in what desperate straits the royalists felt themselves to be—those at any rate who did not wilfully close their eyes against continued disaster—so that they grasped any means, avowable or not, that would give them some slight advantage over the enemy, and whilst there was nothing much in the ways of royalist plans that Tubal Longshankes could learn by coming to Broughton Castle, Colonel Scrope had it in his mind that he could learn a good deal by parleying with Tubal.

Even this morning, as Barbara hastened to the stables, she saw Tubal Longshankes coming through the gate house. He did not see her, for she had reached the shrubbery in front of the stable yard before he looked in her direction, but she had spied him some moments before that, walking with a swagger, his hands buried in the pockets of his breeches and whistling a pot-house tune. Barbara was thankful enough to slip, unseen, into the stables; she felt that already Tubal had spoilt the morning for her; the air around Broughton seemed less pure, now that he too breathed it. She had slipped quietly into the loose box, carefully closing the door

behind her, and was squatting down in the straw on the floor, fondling Rex and feeding him with tit-bits, when Colonel Scrope's voice suddenly fell on her ear.

He was apparently in the yard outside, quite close to the stable door, and spoke in subdued tones as if anxious not to be overheard.

"Come in here, fellow," he said; "we shall not be disturbed."

Barbara's first impulse had been at once to jump up and go from hence; but the ever-present dread of Tubal and of his infamous machinations got the better of that impulse, and for the second time in her life she remained motionless, cowering unseen and listening with strained senses to what she was obviously not meant to hear. She had already guessed that it was Tubal with whom the Colonel was speaking, and now she heard that harsh, coarse laugh of his, which grated so ominously on her ears.

"I am at your service, sir," he said airily, "but why this mystery?"

"I would prefer we were alone," Colonel Scrope retorted curtly.

The two men had now entered the stables and closed the door. They were standing within a few feet of the loose box. Barbara by looking up could see the top of Tubal's head with the broad-brimmed felt hat upon it towering above Colonel Scrope.

"Well! What is it now?" the latter queried abruptly.

"Only," Tubal replied drily, "that I can find the

Honourable Jim for you now: he is still in the neighbourhood, and if your men do not blunder as they did the last time they can have him easily enough to-night."

"'Tis not my men who blundered before," Colonel Scrope retorted. "'Twas you, knave, who brought me a lying tale and I was fool enough to give you part payment."

"You wrong me, sir, on my word—" Tubal broke in quickly.

"Your word!" the Colonel exclaimed with bitter contempt. "Your word forsooth!"

"Take it or no, sir; I did not lie to you. Fiennes was at the house of Peter Mudge, the blacksmith; he still goes there from time to time, I do believe, and I know that he keeps his horse in Mudge's shed. But you must be wary with the people in these parts; nor will you capture the Honourable Jim unless you walk circumspectly. The peasantry about here are old tenants of Saye and Sele; though your armies occupy the country, the folk are on the side of Fiennes."

"Well, where can we find him then?"

"That is what I have come hither to tell you; for I know where he will be of a certainty at sundown this day."

"And where is that?"

"By my mother's bedside at Shutford."

"And what should Jim Fiennes be doing at thy mother's bedside, knave?"

"My mother has been ailing of late. Your Honour did not know perhaps that she had been nurse

at one time to Saye and Sele, when my lord was sick. She hath preserved some sort of affection for the family ever since,—why I know not. But 'twill serve your Honour's purpose, for, now that she in her turn is sick, Jim Fiennes comes to visit her —always during my absence, of course—and I've not as much as set eyes on him, for he's as elusive and quick as a lizard, here one moment and vanished the next. But yesterday at sundown I chanced to enter my house by the door just as the Honourable Jim was leaving it by the window, and I heard my mother's querulous voice calling after him: 'Come and see me again, Master Jim, 'tis the only joy I have left these days. Come again to-morrow, Tubal will be from home.' Whereat Master Jim replied, and I heard him quite plainly: 'I'll come to-morrow at this same hour without fail.' After that he vanished into the night, and I made pretence that I had not heard, for I do believe that my mother would sooner cut off her right hand than that harm should come to one of the Fiennes."

It were impossible to give full justice to the cold cynicism, the spiteful cruelty wherewith Tubal Longshankes told his tale of treachery to Colonel Scrope. Barbara in her hiding-place felt her gorge rise at the loathsome bargaining and the vile thought that prompted it. She did not know for the moment which of the two men she despised the most—the man who spoke or the one who listened. Indeed for the moment she hoped that Colonel Scrope was only keeping his indignation in check and that the next instant he would strike the ignoble informer

on the mouth. But nothing of the sort happened and Barbara had only just sufficient strength of mind not to betray her presence by a cry of horror. Rex was lying half on the ground and half across her knees, and she held the dog's mouth tightly with both her hands, lest a sound from him betray them both. Unerring instinct commanded her to sit still, to listen and hear further details of the infamous bargain, wherein buyer and seller were equally vile. What she would do presently, when she had heard everything, she could not at once decide. It would require thought and prayer—oh! prayer above all! Would God allow this fiendish bargain to proceed, or would He smite the two miscreants where they stood? Oh! how hideous was the earth! How vile, how unutterably vile, the passions of men!—greed, lust, ambition, hatred, revenge, the ugly sisters that fight for the possession of men's souls, were triumphant now when one man sold and another one bought a fellow-creature's life.

In the meanwhile the ignoble bartering was going on. God, it seems, did not choose to interfere.

"Listen, fellow," Colonel Scrope was saying in conclusion, "you may be lying again for aught I know. Heaven help you if you are; but if you have told the truth I will give you the twenty pounds which I promised you before. Now go. But if you have played me false then take my advice and put an hundred miles between your heels and me, for by God I swear that I will have you hanged."

"Your Honour is gracious," Tubal rejoined with

a sneer. "Why should I lie to you? Let your men be at my house at sundown to-day and I will come for my twenty pounds to-morrow."

Whereupon, after another word or two, Colonel Scrope turned on his heel and went out of the stables. Barbara heard the click of the latch on the door, then his firm footstep across the flagged yard; she remained in breathless suspense while Tubal appeared to be standing still, waiting or listening. Barbara felt that this was the most horrible moment of her life. Her own helplessness appalled her. She, who had always taken a pride in her own wilfulness, her independence, who had been praised for cleverness and resource, felt weaker, more impotent than her dog. She remained for a long time squatting in the straw, fondling Rex, listening with half an ear to the sounds outside: the Colonel's voice in the distance calling to his men, the snorting and pawing of the horses in their stalls, Tubal's short, sharp breathing the other side of the loose box, whilst no doubt the devil himself was laughing triumphantly at his elbow. What a bargain! What villainy! What a deed worthy of record in the uttermost darkness of hell! Tubal swore loudly; it seemed to ease the tension that had held him rooted to the spot where he had perpetrated this crying infamy. He made a quick movement, and Barbara hoped that he would go; indeed, she felt that his noisome presence so polluted the air about her that in another second she would fall in a swoon beside Rex, smitten with a plague.

But something must at that very moment have

aroused his suspicion, for instead of going out of the stables he turned and pushed open the door of the loose box. Seeing Barbara crouching there, he gave a loud, harsh laugh.

"By gad!" he cried. "I half suspected, Mistress, that you were eavesdropping."

She made no reply, but turned her head away, fondling Rex.

"You have heard?" he asked roughly.

She nodded. "Yes."

"'Tis an unpleasant position for you, Mistress," he went on with a coarse laugh. "What will you do about it?"

She looked up at him and said quietly:

"Wait for guidance from God."

"You won't have much time, and anyway you cannot give a word of warning to Jim."

"Why not?"

"Where will you find him?" he retorted.

She made no reply; indeed, what could she say? Her helplessness entirely overwhelmed her for the moment. Just for a brief second she was conscious of a wild desire to appeal to him once more, to plead, to persuade, to kneel if need be, to drain the cup of humiliation to its last dregs if only she could turn the informer from the loathsome deed. But fortunately reason got the better of that impulse; as well appeal to a stone as to this man. So she said nothing and went on fondling Rex, trying to keep her hands from trembling while she stroked his soft, silky hair.

Tubal remained for a moment or two with his

hand on the door looking down at her; it seemed almost as if he were reading her thoughts. He chuckled softly to himself.

"I offered you a good bargain the other day," he said, "when you came to plead for Jim. You had been wiser, Mistress, to have accepted it."

Still she would not look up, appeared in fact to ignore his presence, and he added with a note of malignant spite: "Now you are going to pay for that whip lash upon my face. You or Jim. I care not which. Some one has got to pay."

Then he turned on his heel and went away. Barbara waited a moment, listening; she heard him crossing the yard, then turning toward the gate house. She gave him another few minutes to get out of sight, then she jumped up and ran out of the stables. Over in the hall of the castle she found Colonel Scrope. He was sitting at a desk writing; his orderly stood close by awaiting orders.

Barbara bided her time; five minutes went by, perhaps ten. Colonel Scrope had not seen her. When he had finished writing he gave some papers to the orderly, who saluted and marched out of the hall. Then the Colonel rose and saw Barbara.

"Why, Mistress," he said suavely, "what procures me the honour—?"

He came up to her, bowed and tried to take her hand, but she withdrew it with a quick, passionate gesture.

"I cannot take your hand, Colonel Scrope," she said, "until you have assured me that you are not going through with this abominable affair."

The Colonel looked surprised.

"This abominable affair, dear Mistress?" he said. "I don't understand. What abominable affair?"

"This buying and selling of a human life, this trafficking with that informer, that spy . . ."

"Ah!" Colonel Scrope ejaculated, and a curious smile found its way to his thin, obstinate lips. "You were eavesdropping, dear Mistress. Is that it?"

"Colonel Scrope—!"

"There! There!" he broke in gently and the curious smile became suddenly pleasant, affable, reassuring. He took her hand in both his and patted it gently, even kissed the cold quivering finger-tips. "What a romantic, charming young lady, to be sure! Eavesdropping, eh?"

"Quite involuntarily," she murmured, "I'll swear."

"Quite involuntarily, of course," he assented, "but we did hear that cruel ogre, Colonel Scrope, proposing to buy off a skunk who was threatening to hand poor James Fiennes over to him, what?"

"Jim Fiennes was my playmate, Colonel Scrope," she pleaded, encouraged by his kindliness, even though something in his manner repelled her; "he is my husband."

"Only for a very little while longer, eh?" he said, with the thought of a sneer on his handsome face. "And only in name, so I understand."

"Only in name, there you are right. But we were all friends, children together once. Cannot you understand what it means to me, what it would mean to me if Tubal—if Jim— Oh! you will not

do it, Colonel Scrope," she went on with passionate vehemence. "You cannot lend yourself, your name, your authority to such infamy. If you have any friendship for me, any friendship for the Squire, for my parents, I entreat you to leave Jim Fiennes in peace."

The Colonel was silent for a moment or two, his keen, hard eyes alone questioning her and searching her face. She slid down on her knees and hid her face in her hands. Was she not prepared to endure any humiliation if only she could avert this awful cataclysm?

"You will let him go in peace?" she pleaded. "You are an Englishman, a soldier, a gentleman, you will not lend your hand to this villainy! An enemy, yes! Fair fight, yes! Death all around, my God, this is war and you men hate one another. But this—this awful abomination—this Judas trick —this vile, unclean thing—you will not do it?— you cannot—it would disgrace us all, sully our cause and our name—you cannot do it, Colonel Scrope, you cannot—"

He listened to her quite quietly, apparently unmoved, only looking down at her bowed head with a half-impatient and wholly puzzled glance. Evidently he was debating with himself, whilst hating to see her in such distress. She was the daughter of one old friend, adopted by another equally dear; she was one of themselves, a staunch adherent and a beautiful woman. Ah, yes! she certainly was that. With those tears in her eyes, and the quivering mouth, she was in truth a pearl. And what man,

be he verging on threescore years and ten as the Colonel was, could endure the sight of a beautiful woman in distress and pleading—pleading for that which could not be granted her? Colonel Scrope was obstinate and he was one of that type of soldier for whom the life of any one individual was of as little account as that of a dog or a horse. And if some slight advantage to his own side could be derived by the death of one man, why then 'twere madness not to kill. Indeed, the Colonel would have hung his own brother without compunction or without remorse if that brother were a danger to the King's cause.

But all the same he could not bear to see a pretty woman cry.

"There, there, dear Mistress!" he said after a while, "you must not distress yourself like that. These pretty eyes were not made to weep, and that pretty mouth— Ah! if only I were a few years younger! There, there! Let me call your waiting woman, and take my advice now, the advice of an old man, and go and get an hour's rest. You are overwrought by what you heard, but, believe me, the old ogre is not as bad as your young fancy painted him; and when a beautiful woman pleads what can weak man do but submit?"

Barbara could scarce believe her ears. In a moment she was on her feet, her eyes glowing with this sudden ray of hope.

"You will," she murmured vaguely, "you will—"

"I will what?" he asked, smiling somewhat grimly.

"Turn your back on the informer and leave Jim Fiennes in peace?"

"Have I not said that I never could bear to see a pretty woman cry?"

"Oh, thank you! Thank you!" she cried, and her voice came half-choked through her throat, broken by this sudden emotion, this great unexpected joy. "How foolish I was not to have come to you before—to be frightened, half frightened of you. I ought to have known that you were as generous as you are brave. Then you will let the matter rest there?" she insisted. "You will not send your soldiers after Jim? You promise?"

Just for the space of a second he appeared to hesitate, while Barbara's glowing eyes were fixed on him as if she was trying to read his very soul. Then he said gently:

"I promise."

She gave a great sigh and murmured:

"Oh, my God, how I shall pray for you to-night!"

And with sudden impulse she seized his hand and pressed her soft, moist lips upon it. The next moment she was gone, running out of the hall and up the stairs. Colonel Scrope could hear her singing as she ran.

"Damn!" he said vigorously.

He looked at the back of his hand for a moment or two, then he wiped it against his doublet.

"Damn!" he ejaculated once more.

After which he called loudly for his orderly.

CHAPTER V

The Cataclysm

§ 1

BARBARA felt happier after this than she had felt for many days. The feeling that she had circumvented that abominable plot restored to her that sense of independence and of personality which seemed to have slipped away from her from the moment that she saw the tell-tale, scarred hand grasping the window frame in the inn at Daventry. It was indeed strange that from that hour Barbara had become conscious of her impotence, her weakness as a woman. Pity and sentiment had prompted her to shield Tubal on that occasion, that is, to say nothing to the Squire about the miscreant whom she had seen in the window-recess and who had threatened her with a pistol; in the same unaccountable way she had said little about the man she had seen trying to rob the King's coach at Farndon Fields; it was only later, when she heard what a miserable skunk and informer Tubal really was, that she had felt the hatred against him which dominated her every other feeling now.

She left Colonel Scrope's presence altogether a different woman; and for the first time since many weeks and months she went about the house chir-

ruping like a young bird. She ate her dinner with a healthy appetite, and after it she ran out into the garden singing. She sang with joy because the day was warm and there were big thrushes on the lawn, because the crimson rugosa was in full bloom and the Madonna lilies in bud; because she could hear a woodpecker tap-tapping on the old oak-tree, and because men were not so wicked and inhuman as of late she had been made to think them.

Anyway Jim would be left in peace until he was able to look after himself, and all the abominations at which Tubal had hinted so callously would not pollute this exquisite summer's day. Poor Jim! What a terrible plight was his to be hiding for his life, tracked like some wild beast with bloodthirsty hounds on his trail. Barbara felt a vague desire to see his sad face break into a smile when he heard the good news that for the nonce he was secure. Indeed that vague desire became quite definite presently, and it was coupled with the certainty that some one ought to tell him to go away from the neighbourhood as quickly as may be—and above all to avoid the vicinity of Shutford as he would a plague-sticken area.

. . . And the more did she think of this, the more convinced did she become that it was her duty to try and find Jim; everything about her on this warm midsummer's afternoon urged her to this duty: the warm intoxicating air, the scent of roses, the call of thrush and blackbird, all appeared very insistent on the subject. She must find Jim, they said. . . . She must find Jim and tell him to go

away, and they would all promise to help her to find him. Oh! she would find him, she had no fear as to that. There was a duty to perform and God would guide her. It was a duty and she must do it even at the cost of a blow to her pride. Jim had been so curt with her the last time, she would have to put a curb on her temper and swallow her wrath if he turned coldly away from her.

But even while she argued this point with herself, she knew that she would try and find him, and knew that she could not fail; she even knew just where she would seek him and at what hour. Was he not going to Shutford? And were not his favourite woods but a short mile from the house? She even went to the length of telling Matthew to have her horse Stella saddled for her at seven o'clock; she thought that would be a good time for finding Jim, as Tubal had said something about the sunset. Then she wandered back along the edge of the moat. The sun was still very hot, and, feeling tired with the many emotions that had torn at her heart the last few days, she pulled the old boat from under the boathouse and, piling some cushions into it, she moored it under the overhanging willow tree. From here, through intervening branches, she had a glorious view of the south façade of the castle, with the two massive towers that held the main staircases, and, under the roof of the western one, the fateful council-chamber wherein reposed the King's cabinet. Dreaming, meditating, snuggled amongst the cushions, she lay for some hours, drowsy at times, at others reading. She had taken

one of her favourite books with her—*"The Faërie Queene"* by Mr. Spenser—and at first she read on diligently, while the gentle swaying of the boat, and the peace and silence around her, lulled her into a kind of contemplative ecstasy. She read on, happy in the sonorous rhythm, the quaint fantasy of the poem, until she came to the line: "Looking my love, I go from place to place," whereupon her hand that held the book dropped down into her lap, and she lay back upon the cushions, watching the translucent blue above her peeping in and out of the tangle of pale green willow leaves.

"Looking my love, I go from place to place," she murmured once or twice, and then felt profoundly melancholy, immeasurably sorry for herself. What an exquisite sensation it must be to go roaming—say, in the woods in midsummer—looking for one's love, with of course the certainty of finding him in the end. To find some one whose arms would be outstretched, whose eyes would glisten, whose lips would utter a cry of joy at sight of one! My God, what an ecstasy! But an ecstasy which she, Barbara, would never, never in life experience. The greatest happiness granted by heaven to any woman on this earth she would never know. What had she done? In what way had she sinned to be denied the priceless birthright of every woman—a good man's worship. It was cruel, cruel. Young, ardent, full of life and the power to love, she was tied, irrevocably tied, to one who had not the faintest regard for her. Never could have. He showed that plainly enough in the woods

that afternoon when she smiled on him and said tender words of friendship and of pity and he was so curt, so cold, and made her understand—oh! so mercilessly!—that he did not care! And she was irrevocably tied! No longer could she delude herself with the belief that some day she would be free, free to love and to wed again. Time had dragged on, troubles had accumulated; when this unfortunate country was at peace again she probably would be too old and certainly too weary to start life anew. It was now, now at this hour, on this glorious midsummer's day that she craved for love, for something sweet and tender that would wrap her in protecting folds, away, away from strife and hatred and cruelty, and would waft her to some far-off, lonely shore, where she could forget everything and only live for love. In her heart she felt an infinity of tenderness rendered barren by destiny, a power for self-sacrifice and worship all made powerless by an adverse fate. All around her the birds were nesting, the air was filled with the hum of insect life and the roses offered their fragrant corollas to the insistent kiss of the bees. Life was all around her, life and love, the beauty of the sky and fleecy, racing clouds, the beauty of the dewdrop on the petals of water lilies, the beauty of stately reeds bending to the west wind's caress; and a great ache, a wild longing so filled her heart that a sob rose to her throat and the tears welled up into her eyes. A longing? She hardly knew for what! She just stretched out her arms and clasped them, empty, to her young breasts.

§ 2

A moor hen's melancholy call came trembling through the hot, still air. Barbara opened her eyes and gazed lazily about her. A while ago she had been dreaming, day-dreams—dreaming and longing. Then she must have fallen asleep. It had been early afternoon when last she had looked upon the castle walls, dense shadows had lain upon the rose garden and the afternoon sun had turned the water of the moat to a sheet of sparkling diamonds. Now the solid mass of the castle hid the sinking sun; overhead the sky was a tangled mass of fleecy, golden clouds, through which peeped glints of mellow azure; the castle walls rose grim and dark with only one point upon their surface glistening like a jewel, there high up in the tower where an open casement caught one spark of fire from the rays of the sun.

Barbara shook herself free from the delicious torpor that had lulled her to sleep, chiding herself for allowing precious time to slip by. Judging by the shadows, it must have been now close on six o'clock, and she had intended to get to horse soon after this on her search for Jim. Quickly she reached for the oars and pushed off from under the willow tree; as the boat glided soundlessly out into the open she chanced to look up straight at the castle walls. Ever after she vowed that it was God's will that she should look up just then. Others said that it was Destiny, but Barbara believed in God and that it was He alone who guided her fate

then. She believed that God touched her eyes at that moment and turned them to the castle walls —to the tower of the west staircase, and thence to the window of the council-chamber, way up under the roof—sixty feet or more from the ground —the chamber which held that sacred trust, the King's cabinet. One casement of the window was open, and it was a tiny diamond-pane in that casement that had caught a ray of the sun and was glistening like a fire opal. Barbara, quite dazzled for the moment by the brilliant light, fell to wondering why that window should be open, and the next instant she became aware of something moving upwards between it and the roof above—something feline, swift and sure-footed, climbing upon that precipitous wall, whereon no ordinary human being could have found a foothold. A few seconds later the vision had vanished between the two pointed gables at the top of the tower; but Barbara was no longer in doubt as to what it was that she had seen. The council-chamber, the open window, the perilous climb! Not a feline, but a man had risked his life on that grim, sheer wall in order to steal the King's cabinet. A man! A spy! The man with the scarred hand across whose nefarious path Barbara had twice found herself, but who, it seems, was destined to foil her in the end.

The thought of it all, the horror, the dread, came on her like a thunderbolt. What time or chance she had to circumvent the enemy she could not calculate. All that she could do was to act. She pulled vigorously into shore and a few seconds later

was speeding on winged feet through the rose-garden and into the house. To the first soldier she met she gave peremptory orders to find Colonel Scrope. Fortunately he was in the hall in company with Major Lovell. It took Barbara but a few moments to tell him what she had seen. At once the castle became alive with sounds and bustle. Barbara, with Major Lovell close at her heels, was the first to reach the landing outside the council chamber. The sentry on guard had heard and seen nothing; the chamber itself appeared, on quick inspection, undisturbed, save for the fact that the casement of the west window had been wrenched open from outside and that the King's cabinet had been forced open and its contents extracted. Colonel Scrope had already sent some of the soldiers out on the roof and others to search the grounds for traces of the fugitive. There was no doubt that the thief had swum the moat, probably near the ruins of the old gatehouse, where the distance between the water and the castle was at its narrowest; then he had made his way up on the roof by means of the ivy which was thick on this side and which indeed bore distinct traces of his passage on its torn branches and ragged tendrils, and had then crept along until he reached the top of the western tower. Here, with the help of a rope, he had lowered himself to the window of the council-chamber, and, having accomplished his purpose, returned the way he came. The rope still lay there in a bundle on the roof between the two gables, mute witness to

the amazing contempt of danger that the bold stroke implied.

The man had clung to the rope with one hand whilst forcing open the casement with the other, then swung himself into the room; and the return —the climb upwards—must have proved more precarious still. Those who looked out of the chamber window down to the ground sixty feet below shook their heads in wonderment. The spacious, intricate battlemented roofs of Broughton, however, kept jealously guarded the secret of the audacious daredevil's escape; neither here nor in the grounds could the slightest trace of him be found. Once only did it seem to Barbara, as she gazed out from one of the windows in the tower, that on the further shore of the moat a clump of reeds was shaking as if disturbed by something more insistent than a breeze, and it seemed to her that through the stately blades of tall grass a pair of eyes were looking straight at her. Looking! It all was but a momentary vision, and less than a second later the pair of eyes had vanished; only the reeds quivered once more, as if under the touch of a tremulous hand. By the time that she had drawn one of the men's attention to the spot even the reeds were still.

CHAPTER VI

Sunset

§ 1

WHEN the search was finally pronounced to be fruitless, a pall as of death descended upon the Castle. The soldiers hardly dared to talk amongst themselves; they sat about, singly or in groups, silent, full of dread lest some or all of them be held responsible for the terrible event. The officers too went about on tiptoe, wishing themselves anywhere but at Broughton Castle just now. Colonel Scrope was a man who would find a scape-goat in the present cataclysm at all costs —even that of justice. That a certain measure of carelessness was the primary cause of the catastrophe could not be denied, but when all was said and every argument adduced it remained a fact that thirty pairs of eyes had not proved sufficient to keep watch over every angle and corner of the stately and irregular pile. Every possible access to the council-chamber had been carefully guarded save the one which it had been thought was inaccessible to human foot. Colonel Scrope and his officers had envisaged every possibility save that a man would face a hideous death in order to accomplish his purpose. There was an awful moment— after the bustle in and around the castle had subsided and the search been finally abandoned—when

Barbara could only restrain with a great effort of will the bitter words which lay so heavily on her heart. "I told you so!" Colonel Scrope felt the mute reproach in her eyes, and felt it to be justified. His friend Major Lovell vowed that the poor man at that hour had indeed thoughts of suicide. His position would in the future be intolerable. All the leading royalists, all the most loyal adherents of the King, had dreaded the publication of His Majesty's correspondence with Lorraine and with the disaffected Irish, well knowing that the whole nation would resent it bitterly that the King should think of bringing foreign troops upon English soil. And now, of course, that publication was but a question of days—and he, Colonel Scrope, had been in command of the Castle when the precious cabinet had been so daringly filched. No wonder that he fingered his pistol with a quaking hand and that his brother officers thought it well to keep a watchful eye over him until the first excitement of self-reproach had calmed down. Only to Major Lovell did Barbara say something of that which lay so heavily on her heart.

"I begged him," she cried, still hot with indignation, "not to traffic with Tubal Longshankes."

Major Lovell protested feebly.

"'Tis not proved yet," he said, "that that rascal did the trick. I for one do not believe he had the pluck for such an exploit. One cannot help but pay grudging tribute to the courage, the resourcefulness which went to the accomplishment of the doughty deed."

Barbara was willing to admit that. She too failed to reconcile Tubal's mean personality with the utter disregard of danger implied by the adventure. But she was convinced nevertheless that Tubal had done it. She had seen him at Daventry and again on Farndon Fields. It was Tubal; she could not doubt it. But it was no use to speak of it any more. No use to argue. The deed was done. The awful thing had happened. If Colonel Scrope, overwhelmed with remorse, did end his life by his own hand, 'twere only to add one more horror to an overfull catalogue. She felt too that her very presence must seem like a perpetual reproach to the unfortunate man; and in very truth he was no more to blame than any one else. Barbara herself, who knew Broughton Castle and its intricacies out and out since her childhood, had never thought that the council-chamber could be reached from the roof.

Well, there was an end to a happy dream: the dream that the inestimable boom had been granted her to do something for her King, to guard his treasure for him, and to shield his good name. All that was of the past, and Barbara, now that the turmoil was over, was conscious chiefly of intense discouragement. It seemed in truth as if God was no longer on the King's side. That awful disaster at Naseby, and now THIS!! What would be the end of it all? More hatred of a certainty; for defeat on the one side and victory on the other would feed those passions which up to now had only tentatively reared their heads.

Barbara fell to wondering what Jim felt about it all. Ever since that fateful day in August three years ago, when first the King raised his standard against his people, Jim had appeared so detached, so indifferent. Surely he cared! No man could help caring now that it had come to this—the King a fugitive in his own country, his people's hand against him, his adherents falling away from him one by one. Surely Jim cared! But how listless he had seemed that day in the woods, how sad! It seemed as if some terrible grief lay like a mill-stone about his neck. And as Barbara thought of the sadness in his eyes, her own immediately filled with tears. She brushed them quickly aside with an impatient gesture. Why should she care if he did not?

The house was quite still now and the shadows were lengthening on the lawn. Overhead the tangled mass of clouds was of a vivid rose while upon the moat the moist surface of the water-lily leaves mirrored an hundred tints of amethyst, of emerald and chrysoprase. The setting sun had thrown a mantle of ruddy gold upon the water and through it loomed the dark reflections of the distant woodland, dense and blue and trenchant, seeming more solid even than the trees.

§ 2

It was in that same listless spirit of discouragement that Barbara had wandered about aimlessly in the garden, hardly conscious of the beauty of the

sunset, the exquisite peace of her surroundings. After a while she bethought herself of Rex and walked over to the stables to have a look at him.

The first thing she saw was Stella, saddled, and Matthew standing, waiting, beside her. Up to this moment she could not herself have told you whether she meant to adhere to her former purpose of seeking Jim or not, but now, seeing Stella, she was suddenly convinced that the necessity to see him, to beg him to leave the neighbourhood, and on no account to go to Shutford again was more imperative than it had ever been. How could she for a moment forget that urgent necessity? Colonel Scrope, she knew, had already given orders to scour the country for that rascal Longshankes; a posse of mounted men had, she believed, already started upon that errand, and whilst seeking for Tubal might they not chance upon Jim Fiennes and think to make a noble capture that would please their Colonel?

It was Stella's gentle whinny at sight of her that brought all these thoughts back as a flash to Barbara's mind. To give a quick order to Matthew, to run back into the house and put on riding attire was the work of ten minutes at the most. Indeed less than a quarter of an hour later she was away on Stella's back across the fields; a gallop over the stubble, a jump or two over hedges and the narrow stream, and she found herself within sight of the blacksmith's cottage. That, in truth, had been her first objective: Tubal did say that

Jim came to visit Peter Mudge from time to time and that he kept his horse here. And when Barbara reined in Stella she saw that a sleek bay was stabled in the shed. But she had some difficulty in persuading Mudge that her intentions toward Jim were friendly and in extracting information from him as to Jim's possible whereabouts.

The man was obviously a passionate adherent of his liege lord and of all the Fiennes, and looked as if he would go through a great deal in his loyalty to them. He proved very obstinate at first, and though Barbara could not help but commend him in her heart yet she could have cried with vexation, for time was slipping by and the danger to Jim growing imminent.

"If you will not help me, man," Barbara pleaded with passionate earnestness, "to find the young Master, then I will search for him alone. There are enemies on his track and if he be caught then God help you, for his death will be at your door."

But the man shook his head with quiet stubbornness.

"Are ye not too an enemy of the young Master?" he retorted. "You, his wife, and on the side of those who would kill him if they had the chance."

"Yes! I, his wife," she rejoined, as obstinate as he. "I, his wife! Think you I am that vilest thing on earth, a woman who would betray her own husband?"

He looked at her with shrewd, searching eyes, and she returned his glance, throwing her very soul

into a final mute appeal. She saw that she had touched him at last. Indeed few men possessed of any sentiment could resist for long an appeal from Barbara's eyes. Now a dweller in the woods, be he poet or blacksmith, can never wholly free himself from sentiment, and old Mudge, who spent most of his spare time wandering amidst stately beeches and graceful ashes and whose ears were attuned to the song of every bird and the patter of all the tiny feet that haunt the woods, was no exception to the rule, and in face of Barbara's earnest prayers his suspicions melted like snow beneath the warmth of the sun.

"Sure, and you will find the Master in the woods yonder, Mistress," he said at last, "where 'e do play about with the squirrels and such like little beasts, just as if 'e was one of they. But," he added, and his ragged voice at once became stern and threatening, "may the great God punish you if you go to Mister Fiennes with evil intent."

He now went to the length of suggesting that his grandchild Rebecca, the lass who kept house for him, should accompany Barbara and guide her to Mr. Fiennes' most favoured spot. But this Barbara refused. She wanted to be alone, why she did not know; all she knew was that she would certainly find Jim unaided. To say that for the moment she had forgotten the terrible cataclysm of this afternoon would be to do Barbara Fiennes an injustice; but she certainly had ceased to think of it all the while that she was pleading with the smith. Now

he held her stirrup whilst she dismounted and promised to look after Stella until her return. She sprang lightly to the ground, feeling strangely excited, and a few moments later was on the edge of the wood.

CHAPTER VII

Looking My Love

§ 1

SHE had thrown aside riding gloves, plumed hat and whip, leaving these in Rebecca's care, and, holding up the heavy folds of her velvet habit, she paused one moment, savouring the exquisite pleasure that lay before her—the pleasure of wandering through woods at sunset.

Gazing through the vista of beech and ash and graceful birch, she experienced that feeling which comes to the true lovers of trees, the feeling of standing on the threshold of a beautiful church—of one of God's most exquisite dwelling places. The greyish-green stems of stately beeches were the tall columns which supported the high arched roof of leaves, and disclosed an endless panorama of aisles and transepts and numberless side chapels, wherein the setting sun had lighted a thousand candles upon innumerable altars fashioned of flowering undergrowth. The leaves of sycamore and chestnut, each holding a drop of moisture, were so many holy water stoups, and all about the spiders had made the most perfect rose windows. The harebells, gently swaying in the evening breeze, called insistently to prayer, and the sexton bumblebee flew about fussily to see that everything was in order.

Down below the toadflax and the vetch the daisies and many-coloured pimpernels were an attentive congregation, whilst a splendid butterfly in gorgeous vestments mounted the purple-draped pulpit—a tall Campanula.

And Barbara for that one moment caught a glimpse of that fairy-world which exists only and is only peopled by the fancy of those who dream. She could hear the hymn sung by the marguerites and the song of praise of the meadowsweet struck loudly on her ear; her dreams were saying their prayers, her hopes were kneeling hand in hand; the thrushes sang of romance and the briar rose whispered of love.

§ 2

Barbara wandered on; the woods were as still as woods alone can be, with the myriads of sweet sounds that fill the air and yet make for a heavenly silence. And every one of those sounds, the buzzing of wild bees, the call of the thrushes, the whistling of blackbirds, the cooing of wood pigeons, all brought with them to her senses some past memory, some bitter-sweet remembrance of long ago—all intertwined with thoughts of Jim. She had perhaps been too young in those far-off days to appreciate the full joys of those wanderings through the country-side with him, when he used to show her the carefully hidden nests of birds or the lair of tiny beasts, unseen by most. He had taught her to know every bird by its song, and together they would

make up long conversations which they vowed the heavenly songsters held with one another. She remembered one very hot argument she had once had with Jim when she declared that the thrush kept on saying: "He did it! He did it! He did it!" whilst Jim would have it that it said: "Come to bed! Come to bed!" and then wound up with an impatient: "Oh, dear!" And there had been a heavenly night long ago when she was on a visit at Broughton Castle and he had come into her room and wakened her just because a nightingale was singing outside her window in the branches of the tall ash tree. Jim made her get out of bed, and she, though terrified that Mistress Leake would scold her, had nevertheless been compelled to obey. She had thrust her feet into her shoes and, holding on to Jim's hand, she had sat beside him on the settle and listened to the most exquisite hymn of love and praise ever sung upon God's earth. She was little more than a baby then, but she remembered. She remembered how she sat there, not daring to tell Jim that she was cold, for she was half frightened of him in those days, and he, with his wild brown hair and great, glowing eyes, looked just like one of those pixies who dwell in woods and converse with birds and beasts, mysterious creatures of which Mistress Leake, who had been born of Scotch parents, would often tell her.

She remembered. And then all at once she saw him sitting just where she had known all along that she would find him, on the edge of the sand-pit, with his back against the tall beech tree. And for

the moment she held her breath, for the sight of him seemed less like a reality than like a vision of that past which the sounds and solitude of the woods had conjured up. The sunset was behind him and the old beech tree cast its long purple shadow over him, but all around him there were patches of sunset glow upon the moss-covered ground. And all about, upon that dazzling carpet, a feathered assembly had mustered, apparently at his bidding: prosperous looking sparrows, a missel thrush in speckled coat, two sleek-robed blackbirds, and a pair of wood pigeons with arched, sensuous necks and restless movements, whilst a timid robin hovered on the outskirts of this proud company. They had all come to sup with Jim, for he had a chunk of bread in one hand and a knife in the other; some of the bread he ate and the rest he distributed with lavish hand to his guests. How like the past it all seemed! Barbara as a child had oft been envious of the way Jim had with birds: he could make sparrows and robins eat out of his hand, and now! There was a fat hedge sparrow came hopping onto the toe of his boot, and the robin gained courage to come nearer when he threw a crumb expressly for him. The wood pigeons, more stately than the rest, kept the smaller fry at bay, whilst the eternal feud twixt blackbird and thrush threatened to end in a fierce quarrel. Barbara stood still and watched, fascinated. Of late she had forgotten this side of Jim's character; she had only seen him curt, sombre, almost defiant, as if he had a private war of his own with the rest of the world. He

had these moods long ago too, when he was a lad —and it was when these moods were on him that Barbara would positively hate him and turn to Tubal for worship and flattery. But all that was headstrong and contradictory in Jim was always ready to turn to gentleness when he dealt with dumb creatures, and his most obstinate moods would quickly vanish at sight of an animal in distress.

In truth whilst Barbara stood there, more soundless than were the birds about Jim's feet, it seemed as if she were living over again a slice of her past life. Jim feeding the birds, and she, watching, half frightened of him, yet allowing her heart to go out to him for this tenderness. She hardly dared to breathe now lest she should scare his invited guests away, and she had approached so noiselessly that she was quite sure he could not have heard her come.

§ 3

Then, all of a sudden, he spoke to her without as much as turning his head in her direction.

"Do look, Babs," he said, "at that young rascal. Greed is just getting the better of fear."

It was so like Jim. These abrupt calls just when you thought he had been too absorbed to see you. And he had called her Babs! . . . a name she had not heard for many a dreary month, a name that in a flash added a touch of reality to this dream of the past. Now, as then, she never thought of ignoring the summons, and tiptoed forward as softly as she could. But at the first movement from her

there was a loud whirr and the feathered assembly was away, vanished amidst the branches and the canopy of leaves.

"I have scared them," she murmured ruefully.

Jim struggled to his feet.

"Oh, they'll come back," he said confidently; "there is nothing so daring as a robin when there are no sparrows nigh. Look at him, peering at us, the young scamp!"

Barbara tried to look in the direction in which he pointed, but her eyes were unaccountably dim and she could see nothing but the tangle of young chestnut and oak. She thought Jim looking more lonely, more forlorn than before; his eyes were circled with purple and glistened as if they were lighted from within by some torturing, unnatural fire; and there were, oh! such lines of bitterness and mental suffering around his mouth! Barbara felt strangely constrained, half frightened of him, as she was wont to be, but, in spite of her fears, filled with infinite compassion not only because of his loneliness, but because she had the feeling that all about him there hovered some grim, ugly spectre: the shadow of a secret and unavowable tragedy.

Thus they stood for a moment in silence—these two who were bound to one another by the strongest human tie ever devised by man or God, but with an immeasurable abyss between them of divergent aims and warring ideals. Barbara could scarcely endure the sense of oppression that choked the words in her throat. She was waiting unconsciously for a word of encouragement from Jim, but none

came, and at last, angered with herself for her shyness, yet still afraid to tell him the real reason for her coming, she murmured vaguely, stupidly:

"I came—I mean—I thought you might like to hear how your little patient was getting on."

In a moment his face lighted up with pleasure and interest.

"Rex?" he exclaimed. "How is the foot?"

"Almost well," she replied eagerly. "Matthew has been such a good nurse! But now that the young rascal feels better, we shall have vast trouble to keep the foot from the ground. You would not allow me thank you the other day, Jim—but I hoped that to-day—I might—"

She felt herself blushing, and all at once the words failed her. It was Jim's intent glance that confused her and brought the blood up to her cheeks; but somehow her confusion now was not unpleasant—quite delicious in fact, only that she could not quite meet his eyes and lowered her own, murmuring:

"I thought that I might thank you to-day, and so I came . . ."

Then she paused, and as he still said nothing she looked up at him once more. That glance in his eyes was certainly very confusing. And now it changed, hardened as he rejoined very coolly:

"I hope that you did not come all this way on this hot afternoon for so futile a purpose. To thank me for what gave me a moment's pleasure was surely not worth an evening's fatigue."

It was so ungracious and so like Jim to speak

like that! Barbara felt her soft mood yielding to anger, and all her shyness giving place to wounded pride.

"You choose to be harsh and unkind, Jim," she cried hotly, "though Heaven alone knows why. I have come to you as a friend; I spoke to you as a friend the other day, and you have done naught but repulse me." Then, as he persisted in his obstinate silence, she added more softly:

"Are we not to be friends, Jim?"

She held out her hand, and in truth could anything look more winsome, more desirable than she with the twilight closing in about her and the glints of dying light peeping through the chestnut coppice like a thousand eyes? Jim, however, did not take her hand, perhaps he did not see it, for his deep-set eyes had in them an unseeing look. As her arm dropped back to her side she murmured with a dispirited little sigh:

"You seem to be forever reproaching me, Jim, for some fault which I vow I never committed."

"I? Reproaching you?" he exclaimed, and added under his breath: "Heavens above!"

"Else why are you so cold, so distant? Is it my fault, I ask you, that our parents thrust us into one another's arms? Are we not both the innocent victims of circumstances? I was little more than a baby then, and since then have you done aught to draw me nearer to you? Our aims and our ideals are widely different, it is true, but I have oft wondered if such things really mattered between friends as much as some people would have us be-

lieve? Do I deserve your hatred and contempt because my upbringing hath made me loyal to the King? Or is it because I am the one woman to whom you are irrevocably tied and whom you could never love?"

"Mistress, for pity's sake," he murmured. The broken-hearted appeal seemed to have been wrung out of him against his will, and when her voice broke in a sob he uttered a cry which sounded like that of an animal in pain and buried his face in his hands.

Barbara suddenly felt very tired; she sank down on the soft carpet of moss and rested her head against the trunk of the beech. So she remained for a few moments, with eyes closed, whilst all around her the shadows gathered and the magic spell of the night held her close. Far away the wood pigeons were softly cooing. Then she re-opened her eyes; she saw Jim standing just above her, his elbow resting against the tree trunk, his head leaning upon his hand. She felt rather than saw that he was looking at her, but his expression she could not define, for the gathering shadows had drawn a veil over his face.

"Jim!" she called out with a note of pathos in her voice.

"At your service, Mistress," he replied gently.

"Could we not be friends?"

"We are friends, meseems," he asserted with just a ghost of that whimsical smile she knew of old, "or surely you were not here."

"I came because I knew you were in trouble, be-

cause you have been sick and seemed so lonely. Jim," she went on earnestly, "you must not remain in this neighbourhood. Indeed, indeed you must not. I tried to warn you before, yet it seems that I succeeded but ill. To-day but for—but for—but for an untoward circumstance a troop of soldiers would have been sent out to scour the country after you. Even now I am not sure. If some of them chanced to come across you—my God! It would mean death to you!"

She had spoken more and more vehemently, turning so that she could look full into his face, and her eyes emphasised the earnestness of her appeal. He did not move whilst she pleaded; he just remained standing, looking down at her, with his head resting against his hand, his outspread fingers casting a shadow over his eyes.

"Jim," she reiterated now with passionate earnestness, "I came to find you only to beg of you to go. You cannot hold your life so cheap that you can thus fling it away in sheer obstinacy. What should hold you here in this one spot where a few of us have congregated who are still loyal to our King? Way away, all over England, your friends are masters and ours fugitives, then why remain here where if you chanced to be in trouble those who care for you could not come to your aid?"

"Those who care for me," he rejoined simply, "they are so few that they can easily be left out of reckoning."

"It is cruel to say that, Jim—cruel and unjust. My lord Saye and Sele was ever a kind father."

"A splendid, loyal and great gentleman," Jim assented fervently; "'tis hard on him to have such a wastrel for an eldest son, whilst he finds his pride in the younger ones."

"'Tis for you to show him that you are no wastrel, Jim, by fighting beside him as Nathaniel and the others do."

"Would you, Mistress," he asked with good-humoured irony, "then urge me to take up arms against the King?"

"I cannot understand," she replied evasively, "what keeps you here."

"Would it surprise you very much, I wonder, if I were to tell you?"

She smiled up at him and said simply:

"Try me."

"My intention was to go hence to-night," he said very slowly, "but now that I have seen you—why, it is you, Babs, who are keeping me here."

"I?"

She frowned, a little puzzled, trying to divine his meaning, and the next moment he was down on one knee beside her.

"Do you really think," he asked with a strange tremor in his voice which had suddenly become infinitely gentle, "do you really think that a man can go and put miles between himself and those eyes of yours? Do you think that I could deliberately turn my back upon the one hope that has gladdened my life these æons past—the hope of seeing you from time to time, the chance to catch a glimpse of you wandering amidst the roses of Broughton,

or gazing out of your window o' nights on moonbeams less exquisite than your eyes, less pure than your lips? You marvel what keeps me here, you say, when any moment my miserable life might be the price asked of me by God for granting me the supreme boon of breathing the same air that you breathe! My dear, it is my heartstrings that keep me enchained on the spot that your feet have trod, and it is the magic of your occasional presence here that makes these woods a paradise. And," he added quaintly, with an indefinable little sigh, "a man doth not go forth willingly out of paradise."

She had listened to him, scarce realising what it was that she heard. Once or twice at first she had tried to stop him, had in fact put up her hands, ready to shut out from her ears the very sound of his voice, for she did not know at first whether it was his voice or merely the magic spell of the woods that caused her heart to beat wildly and her pulses to throb. She did not know at first whether the strange oppression that loosened her limbs and weighed like lead about her brows was one of exquisite pain or of an infinity of joy. Strangely enough she felt no surprise. Jim, kneeling there beside her and allowing the love that filled his heart to pour itself out in a flood of impassioned words, had suddenly shed all those dreamlike and unreal qualities wherewith she had endowed him these years past. It was the curt, callous, obstinate Jim who was a spook; this man with the glowing eyes and the mellow infinitely gentle voice was the real Jim of long ago, the boy whose practised hands

would soothe any dumb creature who was in pain, whose trained eyes would seek the fledglings in their nests and whose ears were attuned to the call of every tiny beast and the song of every bird.

And Barbara listened, spell-bound, with moist lips parted and eyes half closed, whilst all around her the midsummer's night wrapped the silent woods in its embrace, whilst the song of birds was stilled and the woodland flowers folded their petals in decorous sleep. And even while Jim spoke she understood all that had been a mystery to her all this time—the mystery of his heart and of her own. She knew that he had loved her since the beginning of things; he had loved her when as a boy he could not listen to the song of the nightingale unless he held her hand and she listened too; he had loved her when she had toddled beside him and he had revealed to her baby eyes some of nature's most enchanting secrets; he had loved her when he had quarrelled with Tubal, when jealousy had made him harsh to her, and when on her wedding day he had allowed boyish passion to get the better of him and had forced her to kiss him. And years afterwards, when she swore to Squire Brent that never would she allow Jim to hold her in his arms, she knew now that it was with a look of undying love that he bade her a last mute farewell.

He had loved her since the beginning of time and she had been alternately fond and piqued, wilful and disloyal, and of late infinitely full of that divine pity which is the gentle, sorrowful sister of love. She did not know now whether he was still speak-

ing or whether it was the spirit of the woods that continued to echo the endearing words that had opened wide the portals of her heart. She just sat on, with eyes closed, savouring this new, this wonderful happiness that had come to her, knowing now that all strife, all doubts and sorrows were at an end and that the longing which had racked her soul had found its complete fulfilment. Jim loved her, and no longer would he be lonely, for he was her husband—her man in the sight of God and men. Let others fight and pursue one another with hatred, she had found peace, and in such plenty that he could share with her and she remain richer than before.

King, country, cause, all were merged in Jim; his God was her God, his people her people; with her heart he took all and gave all, and outside love there was nothing else that counted.

§ 4

And it was Jim's voice that woke her from that trance. Jim's voice, no longer tender and appealing, but hard and cold once more like the death-dealing breath of a cruel destiny.

"I'll not ask you to forgive me, Mistress," he was saying. "I am a fool—and a criminal fool—and a coward too, and you cannot despise me more than I despise myself. But there! 'Tis over. I would I could persuade you to forget. But I'll do as you bid me. Let that atone. I'll go hence to-night. I'll pass out of your life and you shall

never hear from me again. Times will mend presently. This strife cannot last. Peace will come in the end, and then Squire Brent can arrange the divorce for you. I'll not defend it. I shall be far away by then. Out of your sight. Out of your mind, I hope. Just part of an ugly nightmare out of which you will wake to freedom and happiness."

And even while he spoke he struggled to his feet, painfully, it seemed—certainly slowly; but she was quick enough, quick to hold him back by the hanging sleeve of his doublet, so that he could not get away.

"Jim!" she cried. "You are not going?"

"I'll escort you to Mudge's cottage, Mistress, if you'll allow me," he replied coolly. "And he shall see you safely to the castle. Is your horse there—at the cottage I mean?"

"You are not going?" she reiterated firmly.

"As soon as I know that you are safe," he said, "I will go."

"Whither?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Just hence, as you have deigned to bid me."

"Yes!" she said. "I bade you go. But that was—oh! so very long ago!—an infinity of years ago—time has been at a standstill since then—and now I bid you stay—"

She paused a moment, tugging at his sleeve, and slowly, unconsciously, he fell again on his knees beside her, while she went on a little wildly:

"If you'll stay, Jim, it will be safe—quite safe—I'll make it safe for you—they shall not touch so

much as a hair upon your head—I'll guard you, Jim—they shall not touch you—not now that I know!"

The evening shadows crept slowly over them, folding them closer and closer in a warm embrace. Only through the chestnut coppice the last golden glow in the western sky shone with a mysterious far-away light. But the twilight lingered on, shadowless and translucent, softening every outline, subduing every tone. Every bird note was stilled and the only sound about them was the distant croaking of frogs—a melancholy call through the balmy air.

Jim was silent. He could only watch her with a hungering ache, the while his eyes expressed the immense wonderment that was finding its way into his soul. She, the wonder-woman, had not turned from him in derision. She clung to him now with both hands on his shoulders, her luminous eyes shining upon him, her lips murmuring words that made his senses swoon with ecstasy.

"I want you to stay, Jim," she whispered, "never to leave me again. I have been so lonely all those years! Yet I knew not why! My heart just ached with longing, and I never knew that the longing was for you. But to-day the revelation came—in the afternoon—I was all alone in the boat—the air was hot and the bees were buzzing, the birds singing and I cried just because I was so lonely. My heart was filled with pity for you, and I thought that I could never comfort you because you did not care. But now I know that my longing was for you—that you are my man, and that you need me.

I could not let you go now, Jim—if you went I would go with you—for life without you now would be intolerable desolation."

Oh, the wonder of her! The beauty of her voice! The perfume of her hair! The most wonderful miracle ever wrought by God upon this earth had come about. She did not turn from him, she clung to him, she longed for him. Heavens above! She longed for him! Longed for him! Loved him! Her lips held a promise which he dared not divine. Holding her with his eyes, he put out his trembling hands and took her lovely face between them. She was ready for his kiss. Oh, the wonder of her! The purity of those lips, untouched by any man's! The marvel of the love light that glowed in her eyes! She was ready for the kiss that would forever sear her soul, like a branding iron, destroying all hope of forgetfulness.

He held her face between his hands and gazed and gazed into her eyes as if he would mould his soul to hers and infuse into his innermost being the breath of her, the spiritual entity that made her the wonder-woman she was. And she returned his gaze, untroubled, unafraid, waiting to fall into his arms whenever he uttered the call. Surrender? Oh, God! let him take her now, let not one moment be lost of that blissful eternity which awaited her in this paradise.

"You love me, heart o' mine?" he murmured.

"I love you, Jim," she replied softly.

Oh, the wonder of her! She loved him and he had not known it. The world was paradise and

he had thought it hell! It was filled with transcendent beauty and he had thought it hideous and drab! Oh, how easy it would be now to live! Everything would be simple, easy, beautiful—beautified by that knowledge that she loved him. Even the thought of parting would cease to be a hell. Oh, the inevitable parting! It must be! It must! There was that between him and her which could never be bridged over. But, hard as it would be, hard as the illimitable kingdom of pain, it would be endurable because of this one supreme moment when she murmured: "I love you, Jim!"; endurable because for one brief moment of ecstasy he had held her dear face between his hands and had read surrender in her eyes.

"Say it again, heart o' mine," he entreated. "Just once more!"

And obediently she murmured: "I love you, Jim!" And he, holding her soul in thrall by his gaze, went on in a voice rendered husky with fettered passion:

"And now I implore you, heart of my heart, speak not another word. Let these last which you have spoken ring in my ears till the cold earth closes them forever. Even then they would hear—my ears will hear you, my eyes will see you even when the hand of death is o'er them. My soul, my life, my wonder-woman, I love you with every breath in my body, with every aspiration of my soul. This hour for me is life, all the rest is death. I go now having known life, and that knowledge no power on earth can take from me. I look into

your dear face and upon those perfect lips of yours, and I know that before I go hence mine will cling to them, fill my soul with their touch. After that I go. Never as long as I live will I hold you so near to me as I do now. If I see you again it will be from afar, and then I will gaze on you as a man does on the stars. Beloved of my soul, farewell!"

Before she could speak he had her in his arms and she had learned the immeasurable wonder of a first kiss. She lay in his arms quite still, giving him her soul, her heart, her body, her entire self in that kiss. The word "farewell" had struck on her ear without taking possession of her brain. Indeed her brain would have rejected the thought had it striven to gain admission. Love had come to her in its fullest and highest sense, she had sealed the terms of her surrender with her lips; after that kiss there could be no parting, for parting now could only mean death.

CHAPTER VIII

The Inevitable

§ 1

TIME had ceased to be: light and darkness became merged in nothingness. Obedient as she had always been to him, she did not speak again, only her pulses throbbed to the pæan of ecstasy. "He loves me, and I worship him!"

Anon she felt herself lifted from the ground. She snuggled in his arms, her head resting against his shoulder. Night was about her, but in her heart was sunshine. He carried her in his arms; whither she neither knew nor cared. Mayhap to some distant aerie where he had his dwelling place with the birds and beasts which were his friends. She did not care, for the world had ceased to be and the mantle of night was close and warm. It wrapped her and Jim together and shut out everything else that was in the world, everything that did not pertain to their love.

When the end came and he allowed her to glide gently out of his arms, she lay for a while quite placid, unseeing, ununderstanding, giddy with this awakening out of a dream. She put out her hands, feeling the semi-darkness about her. Then she passed her hand across her eyes and looked vaguely around. What light there was came through two

narrow chinks which marked the presence of a door close by. She was lying on a sofa with a cushion under her head, and from the other side of the door there came the murmur of voices. Soon she understood where she was. Jim had brought her back to Mudge's cottage to rest, and then they could talk over their plans for the future and arrange what had best be done first of all for Jim's safety and then for her joining him as soon as may be. For the moment she was too full of happiness and of wonder to give a thought to outside matters—the political situation, the warring elements that had stood for so long between her and Jim, had all been blotted out of her mind by the magic erasing hand of this wondrous felicity.

When in the murmur that came from the other side of the door she recognised Jim's voice, she rose and tiptoed to the door. She groped for the latch and found it, but before turning it she bent her ear to listen. Jim was speaking and there was something subtly delicious in standing here quite close to him listening to his voice, and with just this thin partition between her and the joy of running out to snuggle once more in his arms.

"She will rest now, I think," Jim was saying, "for she is tired with her long walk. Take great care of her, Rebecca."

"You may be sure I will, sir," Rebecca replied cheerfully.

"Have no fear, Master Jim, we'll look after the lady," came in a rough, kind voice which Barbara recognised as that of Mudge, the blacksmith.

"You'll ride with Mistress Barbara as far as the Castle," Jim went on, "and see her safely through the gatehouse?"

"Of course I will, sir; rely on me. No harm shall come to the lady. And Rebecca shall get her a little supper when she wakes."

"Bless you, Mudge, and you too, wench," Jim said. "I would I could do something for you both in return for all that you've done for me."

Something vaguely terrifying held Barbara rigid while she listened. She could at any moment have run out to Jim and ask him what all this meant, but something kept her glued to the spot, waiting for she knew not what. And now it was the blacksmith who spoke again.

"Mind you, sir," he said, "'twill be safer for you to be out of this neighbourhood. The Colonel up at the Castle and Squire Brent too do say quite openly that they'd wish to see you hanged."

"I was not thinking of my own safety, Mudge, but of you all—dear kind friends—who have helped me all this while."

"We were pleased to see you now and then, Master Jim. 'Twas like old times. But now that the King's forces are scattered," Mudge went on cheerfully, "I'm thinking that his lordship will be returning to the Castle presently and all will be as it was before people took to fighting one another."

"I doubt me, Mudge, if anything will ever be as it was before," Jim rejoined with a sigh. "Not for

some years anyway. We shall all be older then and very different."

"Are you joining the Army, Master Jim?"

"The Navy, Mudge," Jim replied. "When we are at peace with one another we shall have to fight the Dutch I am thinking. I want to get through my training quickly, for I know little of the sea and wish to be prepared."

"Well, 'tis a fine calling, sir, but what made you think of it?"

"Because it is a fine calling, Mudge, and because in the Navy a man is not fighting against those he holds dear."

"Ah! there you are right, Master Jim! When do you join?"

"At once, Mudge. I hope to be well away within the hour."

"Ah, dearie, dearie me!" the old man muttered. "I don't like to see you go, Master Jim, and that's a fact, eh, my wench?"

Rebecca's reply was a loud sob.

"And when do we see 'ee back, sir?"

"When things are once more as they were, Mudge," was Jim's slow, measured answer, "and we have all learned to forget."

"I'll never larn to forget 'ee, sir," Rebecca stammered through convulsive sobs. But the next words were smothered in a gasp of astonishment, even her tears suddenly ceased to flow, for the door leading into the small parlour was opened, and Mistress Barbara stood in the doorway. Ever after little Rebecca vowed that she was haunted by that face,

the great luminous violet eyes that looked black as sloes in the pale, rigid face, the golden hair matted against the blue-veined temples and the lips parted as if in the act of uttering a heart-rending cry. At the moment Mudge was standing beside Jim with head bent and holding the young man's hand in farewell. Rebecca had her apron up to her eyes and Jim's left hand was on the old man's shoulder. At the sound of the opening door, the smith looked up and, seeing Barbara, he looked inquiringly from her to Jim, then prompted by innate delicacy and guessing at a mystery, which it was not for him to probe, he beckoned to Rebecca and together they tiptoed out of the room.

§ 2

Jim for the moment appeared paralysed. This one thing apparently he had not foreseen—that Barbara would wake before he had gone out of her sight forever. Now every line in her tragic face told him that she had heard and that she guessed his purpose. And he was not nerved for an encounter that would place him before the grim alternative of renouncing love or his own self-respect. There was that between him and the woman he had worshipped which no love on either side would ever bridge over; and the only thing left for him to do that was consistent with his own honour was to go out of her life and leave her to forget. But to hear her voice now, to look again into those dear eyes, to meet once more their haunting look of

appeal and of love was, he felt, beyond his power of endurance, and whilst chiding himself for a callous poltroon he turned deliberately from her toward the front door, resolved on flight.

With a sudden cry Barbara ran forward, and by the time that he reached the door she stood between him and his one chance of escape. With arms outstretched she leaned against the woodwork and her eyes, dilated, dark, tragic, were fixed upon him.

"You are not going, Jim!" she said hoarsely, trying to steady her voice.

His face had become the colour of dead ashes. He seemed to her like a man who was suffering indescribable torments; his lips moved, but no words came through them and she reiterated more firmly and clearly:

"You are not going!"

It was not a question; it was an assertion. He was not going. He could not go; what she had heard through the chink in the door was only part of a nightmare which his next word would dispel. But he made no movement, no sign, nor spoke a word, and she said for the third time, in a perfectly steady voice now:

"You are not going, Jim," and she added resolutely, "Not until you have told me what all this means."

She waited for his answer whilst a dull silence seemed to hang about the room. She never moved and he stood a few paces away from her, with head bent, his arms hanging by his side. The minutes

sped on. She could not see his face because the light was behind him—a solitary candle that flickered softly in the draught. Seeing that he remained obstinately silent, she said more peremptorily:

"Tell me, Jim."

"There is nothing to tell you, Mistress," he said at last, and obviously spoke with an effort, "save that I am going."

"Whither?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You heard me tell the smith, I think. They want men in the navy and I would like to go to sea."

"Is it that you wish to leave me?"

"I think it best that I should go."

"Why?"

"We have nothing in common. Your people are not my people, a world of differences must always keep us apart."

"And you set those differences above any consideration for me?"

Again he shrugged his shoulders.

"Our lives were ordered for us long ago," he said coldly. "The Squire has already petitioned for nullity of marriage on your behalf. It is best for us both that we do not set our will against his."

"Then you have decided to leave me not for a time, but for always?"

"Always is a big word. When the present conflict is over I may return. Much will be forgiven and forgotten by then. You will have regained your freedom and found a man worthy to make you happy."

"Is it your wish then—to forget—and to see me happy with another man?"

He nodded and his lips faintly murmured an assent. A quick breath rose to Barbara's throat and ended in a faint, scarce perceptible moan. But she said nothing more for the moment, only watched him quietly as he turned to the table, where lay his hat, and made a gesture to pick it up. Then she called softly:

"Jim!"

He paused and once more did a great silence hang in the low-raftered cottage room. It seemed as if Destiny had entered it and with relentless hand upraised stood by holding for these two the balance of life and death, waiting until the weight of love or duty inclined the scales in the way they would choose. Then Barbara said simply:

"Why do you lie to me, Jim?"

He put up his hand in protest; her abrupt question had evidently caught him unawares; he obviously groped for something to say, but words were never wont to come very easily to him.

"You are lying to me, Jim," Barbara insisted, "when you say you wish to leave me. Or would you rather I thought that when you held me in your arms and vowed you loved me you were lying to me then?

"It is one or the other, Jim," she went on, seeing that he still remained obstinately silent. "I cannot hold you if you wish to go. If you wish to leave me you are free, but before you go look me straight

in the eyes and say to me: 'All that I have whispered in your ear in the woods just now was falsehood and treachery; when I held you in my arms I lied to you. I do not love you, I wish to go.' Say it, Jim," she reiterated, "say it and I will stand aside and neither with word nor look will I strive to keep you here."

There was a note of triumph in her voice now; was she not conscious of the look of burning passion wherewith Jim gazed on her all the while that she spoke?

It was the same look that had thrilled her in the woods, when she lay with her face quite close to his and his eyes had demanded that surrender for which her soul was hungering. But when she finished speaking, and stood there waiting, self-assured, for the cry of love to which she was so eager to respond, she saw that look turn for an instant to one of intolerable pain—for an instant only—and the next it seemed as if an invisible hand had raised a mask up to his face. All expression went out of it, all the light, even the lines of suffering vanished, giving place to a mask of callous indifference. And as she gazed on that sudden transformation in him she had the feeling that in very truth there was an awful spectre at Jim's elbow: a spectre that had whispered to him to close his ears to love, that had extinguished the love light in him and frozen his heart. Jim now looked like a man who has been robbed of his soul and whose body was in thrall to an invisible power that moved him like a puppet.

A cold terror took possession of her; for the moment she thought that he must be demented.

The fear gripped her heart so tightly that she could only gasp for breath, whilst a black veil seemed to fall before her eyes.

"Did you lie to me, Jim?" she cried.

But he only murmured vaguely: "Mistress—for pity's sake—"

"Pity?" she retorted almost fiercely. "Are you showing me any pity now?"

Then with a dull groan he sank into a chair, and, resting his elbows on his knees, he buried his face in his hands. She ran to him, oblivious at once of her fears, of her outraged pride, of everything save that he was unhappy. She knelt beside him and encircled his shoulders with her arms, cooing to him like a mother to her sick baby, or like the wood pigeons a while ago in the old beech tree.

"My dear, my dear!" she whispered with infinite tenderness. "Why do you torture yourself and me? Do you think I could let you go now that I know you love me?"

Then at last a cry was wrung from him—a cry that was fierce and savage and elemental like the cry of primitive man rebellious against unendurable torture.

"For the love of God, heart o' mine," he exclaimed, "let me go hence in peace."

But she shook her head. Now that she had broken through that mask of indifference she felt encouraged to fight, to challenge that mysterious spectre which was robbing her of Jim. He was

keeping back some secret idea; an over-sensitive conscience no doubt had persuaded him that political differences were a serious bar between lovers. What folly it all was! But men had curious ideas, and Jim was highly strung. His brothers, cast in rougher moulds than he, had perhaps worked upon his feelings, and the events of the past few weeks had done the rest. To Barbara it all seemed futile; political ideals must be made subservient to love and to happiness. She would not admit that King or Parliament could part her from Jim. He would go his way and she would keep her feelings and her ideals to herself; the conflict could not last much longer, and when the country was at peace again everything would be forgiven and forgotten. In the meanwhile she would know how to hold her tongue when political events were discussed, and if Squire Brent or her parents felt overstrongly on the subject, then she would cease to have intercourse with them until they were in a less aggressive frame of mind. With the sublime selfishness of love she was ready to throw them all over for Jim; had she not the example before her of both her sisters who had married Parliamentarians? They were happy with their husbands and eschewed political discussions. Was it not futile to think otherwise?

§ 3

All this and more she murmured in Jim's ear whilst she knelt beside him, tempting, persuading with gentle words and the full strength of womanly

affection rather than of nascent passion. She felt on sure ground, for she knew that he loved her; she knew it at the moment that he called to her so fiercely to let him go in peace. It was only a question of who would gain the victory in the fight, she or that spectre of a secret tragedy that had brought such a look of unendurable pain into Jim's eyes. Even now, while she murmured and cooed and soothed him, she could feel resistance in him. He did not fight, but on the other hand he did not yield; he did not speak to her at first or even look at her, but sat with his head obstinately buried in his hands.

"Tell me, Jim," she whispered with tender entreaty. "You must tell me. Whatever it is that is driving you from me I must know it. I have the right to know. My life is at stake, do you understand? My life. My happiness. You gave me both with your love; you have no right to take back that which you have given."

"God forgive me for a cowardly fool!" he murmured. "It will be so much harder now."

"Harder for me, Jim."

He looked up for a moment and met her eyes.

"You will forget, heart o' mine," he said.

"Will you?" she retorted.

Then like a clever strategist she changed her tactics. She ceased to question him and appeared to accept his decision. Very well! He should go away for a time. Rejoin his people; the army if he must. But not the sea! No! No! That was folly! It was not fair on her. The army if he

must; then see his father, his brothers, the leaders of his party. Oh! she was not afraid of discomfort. And she would wait until they could find a suitable home together whither he could come whenever duty permitted. Anyway the conflict was drawing to a close. The people could not go further against their King than they had already done. And every one was weary of the fight. She went on talking about the little home she would make for him until they could come back together to Broughton. In the meanwhile she could go to London, if he wished, or Leicester, or Banbury, Land's End or John o' Groat's; she didn't care. She spoke of the delight she would have when she knew he would be coming, and the happy surprise when he came unawares. She prattled away as a child might do, with artless words and ingenuous phrases and tender caresses, trying to hide even from herself that icy cold grip which invaded her heart and the feeling of discouragement and creeping hopelessness which threatened every moment to break her speech into convulsive sobs. And he did not yield. She felt just as if she were beating against a stone wall, wounding her hands or bruising her heart. His hands fell from his face, but he did not turn to her again, only replied in curt monosyllables when she asked him a direct question; the rest of the time he remained unmoved, staring straight out before him; and he held his arms tightly between his knees and his hands clasped so tightly together that the knuckles shone like pieces of polished ivory. At one moment she caught herself

gazing down at those hands; they looked strong and hard, not, as she would have supposed, the hands of a dreamer, but rather those of a man of action; and it struck her suddenly as strange that she knew so little of Jim, that even his hands appeared unfamiliar.

"What nice hands you have, Jim," she said naïvely, "but look how you neglect them! The skin is quite rough, and the nails are all broken. When I have the care of you we'll remedy all that."

He tried to withdraw his hands, but she clung to them. "No," she went on gaily, "they belong to me and you shall not have them. Is it not a scandal that a man's hands should appear unfamiliar to his wife? Why, look at this mark here," she continued, passing her fingers over the back of his left hand. "I have never seen this scar before."

She gazed down intently upon the scar.

"When did it happen, Jim?"

"On our wedding day," he replied drily. "Dina, your dog, bit me."

"What!" she exclaimed lightly. "Dina? She was vicious that morning. I suppose the wasps upset her. I knew she had bitten Tubal, for he made much of it and a fool of me, but I did not realise that she had been such an ungrateful little wretch after you had saved her life. And you never told me," she added reproachfully.

"It healed very quickly," he rejoined, and once more tried to withdraw his hand from her grasp.

"But it has left a scar," she murmured, and before he could stop her she had bent her head and

pressed her soft, warm lips upon his hand. The next moment, with a heart-rending cry, he clasped her in his arms.

"You love me, Jim," she whispered.

He took her face between his hands, as he had done a while ago in the woods, and once more his eyes held her soul in thrall.

"If I were not such a miserable coward," he said slowly, "I would swear to you now that I never loved you and that I go, not because I must, but because I will. But to lie to you when your heavenly eyes are gazing straight into mine is beyond my power. I go, dear heart, only because I must; not for a while, but for always, and to go from you is such grinding agony that my soul shrinks from it as from the tortures of hell. If you love me, dear heart, ask me nothing more. I go because I must. If I remained I would despise myself so much that even my joy in you would turn to bitterness, and I should be haunted by the spectre of a hideous fear that one day you should know me for what I am —a miserable pariah, lower than a vagabond."

Steadfastly she returned his gaze, and when he had ceased speaking she said firmly:

"There is nothing, Jim, that you could do, nothing you may ever have done that would turn my love from you. Tell me, Jim! I have the right to know!"

"And God help me!" he murmured hoarsely. "I have not the right to tell you."

"Whatever you do, Jim, you cannot cast me from you. I will follow you wherever you go. If you

hide from me, I will seek you, if need be, in the furthest corners of the earth. If you spurn me I will cling to you. If you drive me away I will creep back to your doorstep like a dog. I love you and you belong to me until the hour when you look me in the eyes as steadfastly as you do now and say to me: 'Go hence, I no longer love you!' Then I will go, Jim, but not before."

Her voice was quite firm until the end. When she had finished speaking she closed her eyes, shutting out the world, waiting for his kiss. His two hands were like fire against her cheeks, she felt his heart, his soul, his senses calling to her, demanding from her that complete surrender which she was so ready to give; and when she felt his lips upon hers at last, her exquisite body drooped in his arms like a stately lily scorched by the heat of the sun.

CHAPTER IX

The Scarred Hand

§ 1

ONLY a few moments had gone by; for them it was an eternity. Then the outside world knocked against the gates of their paradise. There was a tumult outside, sound of voices, clatter of horses' hoofs against the ground, a woman's cry, an oath or two. Barbara, whose one thought was Jim and Jim's safety, smothered an exclamation of terror and freed herself almost roughly from his arms.

"It's Colonel Scrope!" she stammered. "Come, Jim, he must not find you—he promised me—but —but I do not trust him—I trust no one— Come, Jim—"

She took his hand and tried to drag him to the next room, which was Mudge's kitchen and had a back door that faced the distant woods. Here in this slip room, between the parlour and the kitchen, they were trapped; the only door that gave directly on the outside faced the road, where men had halted, soldiers had dismounted and were talking, talking loudly, calling for the smith. At one moment Barbara distinctly caught the sound of Colonel Scrope's voice speaking Jim's name.

"Jim," she whispered, "you can easily reach the woods. They don't really want you; it is Tubal Longshankes they are after."

"Tubal?" Jim asked vaguely. It was he now who appeared to be in a dream, not to have heard what was going on outside, and conscious only of an overwhelming desire to make her stay with him a while longer.

"Yes, Tubal Longshankes," she replied insistently. "He is the vilest traitor on God's earth. This morning he was bargaining with Colonel Scrope to sell the secret of your hiding place. I heard him; that is why I came to warn you, Jim. Tubal said you had promised to go to Shutford to see his mother, who was sick."

"Ah, by gad, yes!" Jim exclaimed quaintly. "I had forgotten. But it is not too late," he added, reaching clumsily for his hat.

"You are crazed, Jim!" Barbara broke in impatiently. "Colonel Scrope is a fanatic. He would have you even now if he could—or if his men failed to find Tubal."

Jim frowned. "Tubal?" he asked again. "Why should they want to find Tubal?"

"Because he is the scum of the earth," she replied curtly. "This morning he professed to serve our cause by offering to sell you to Colonel Scrope—this afternoon, at risk of his life, he stole the King's correspondence from the council chamber in Broughton Castle— But if our soldiers find him to-night they'll hang him without trial," she added almost viciously, for love had made her a primeval woman

now and there was in truth no man alive that she hated and loathed more than she did Tubal Longshankes, who had plotted to trap Jim to his death. "Colonel Scrope swore to me that he would hang him before the day was done and—" But before she could utter another word Jim broke in roughly:

"Who said that Tubal Longshankes had stolen the King's correspondence?"

"I saw him," she replied.

"You saw him? How? When?"

"This afternoon. I was in the boat. Under the willow tree. You know the place, Jim, where—"

"Yes, yes! But what did you see?"

"A man hanging by a rope sixty feet from the ground outside the window of the council chamber. Ten minutes later Captain Lovell and I were in the chamber; the King's cabinet had been forced open and the letters had gone."

"But what made you think it was Tubal?"

"I had seen him at the 'Wheatsheaf' in Daventry, spying upon the King's council."

"Oh, God above us!" Jim exclaimed.

"And again after that awful time in Farndon Fields. He tried to steal the cabinet then. But I —I shot him!"

"But how did you know?" he insisted and she could hardly recognise his voice, so harsh and rough did it sound. "How did you know that it was Tubal in Daventry—and on Farndon Fields?"

"I knew him by the scar on his hand. Dina bit him on the morning of our wedding and I had seen

the scar many times. It was on the back of his left hand—very like yours—and—and—"

The words were stifled in her throat; she put her hand up to her mouth to smother the cry of horror that had well-nigh forced itself to her lips.

"Jim!" she murmured hoarsely. "Jim! What is it? Jim! Speak! Deny it! Deny it! It was not you! My God, say it was not you!"

Her eyes dilated for a moment in a spasm of intolerable anguish whilst before them there rose the grim picture of that left hand clinging to the window frame at Daventry and lying outstretched upon the mud at Farndon Fields. Jim's hand! Her senses reeled; the dark, narrow room began whirling and spinning before her eyes. Then the aching lids fell over them, blotting out the vision of that figure hanging by a rope sixty feet above the ground, and of the King's cabinet robbed of its contents. A sudden draught of pure outside air brought her quickly back to complete consciousness; the air first and then the slamming of a door. She opened her eyes and looked about her. Jim had gone.

She heard his voice outside, quite close to the door, and the voice of the smith in firm, desperate entreaty.

"Let 'em be, Master Jim. For God's sake let 'em be! They are after that rogue Tubal Longshankes. But if they saw you—!"

Already Barbara was at the door. She was just in time to see Jim shake himself free from the smith's kindly grasp and then stride rapidly up

the road to where a group of mounted men had halted apparently to speak with others who had come by on foot. She dared not call to him by name; she dared not speak his name with those men near by, who were his enemies. What she meant to do, or could do, she scarcely knew, but she started to run. The next moment she heard Colonel Scrope's voice in the distance calling loudly:

"Hallo! Who is this?"

And Jim's reply: "James Fiennes, Colonel, at your service." Through the silence of the night and through the darkness the voices rose and fell perfectly clear and distinct.

"You damned fool!" the Colonel retorted. "Are you anxious to find your head in a noose? Thank your stars, man, that we are not after you to-night."

"You are after Tubal Longshankes," Jim retorted.

"Ay! The rogue!"

"Because you think that he stole the King's cabinet?"

"Well!" the Colonel queried cynically. "Didn't he?"

"No," Jim replied. "I did."

"The devil—!" came involuntarily from Colonel Scrope.

Barbara was close by now, close enough to shout out loudly, desperately: "It is not true! Not true! Jim is crazed! It was Tubal! Tubal! I saw him! I swear that I saw him!"

But already the Colonel had given a curt word of command. The soldiers closed in around Jim;

one of them dismounted and Jim took his place in the saddle; the others surrounded him. It was all done in the space of a few seconds, even whilst Barbara ran on shouting, "It is not true!" with arms outstretched and the hideous monster of despair gripping her by the throat. Whether the Colonel heard her or no it were impossible to say, whether what occurred after this was by his orders or merely the result of an accident or misunderstanding, who can tell? Certain it is that at the moment that Barbara was within ten yards of the group that surrounded Jim, one of the foot soldiers broke from the ranks and ran towards her, deliberately barring her way. He did not touch her, but he stopped her progress; by the time that she had evaded him, the order was given and the small cavalcade had wheeled to the right and started at a quick trot in the direction of Broughton, raising a cloud of dust behind them. Barbara could not even see Jim amongst the others. The sound of his voice alone went echoing through the night. Soon the darkness swallowed up the horsemen and their trail, only the thud of hoofs rang through the midnight air like the beater of a death-clapper upon a bell that is mute. Barbara stood all alone by the roadside, the blue of the sky spread high above her like a pall and the stars mocking her with their dazzling serenity. From far away came the melancholy hooting of a nightjar, and by the waters of the Nen the army of frogs sent their monotonous croaking through the night. Behind her were the woods, the tall beech trees, the sleep-

ing Campanulas, the cosy nests wherein the fledglings slept; that was the paradise wherein she had been allowed to dwell for one brief instant; its gates now were shut against her forever. Better, better far if she had never entered them. Slowly she sank down on her knees. From God alone could guidance come now. He had shown her a glimpse of heaven, and then driven her forth before she had time to savour its full beatitude. Surely, surely He would not shut her out forever. He had given her the power to love. He had given her Jim's love, the most precious possession in the whole of this world. And He himself had said that love was all, and above all, and beyond all. What she needed now was strength, strength to fight for that happiness which was being snatched from her, and to fight for Jim's life, which was her own. The most simple and sublime prayer ever taught to suffering humanity rose to her lips: "Our Father which art in Heaven!" When she had finished she felt refreshed; strong in her love, firm in her resolve, she rose and turned quietly back towards the cottage; she had not gone more than a step or two when she met the smith and his wench. They had been watching her in silence, not daring to come nigh.

"But when you prayed, Mistress," Rebecca murmured shyly, "gran'father and I joined in with you. Don't be afeard, Mistress, the dear Lord won't allow harm to come to Mister Jim."

Barbara was unable to speak, for the tears choked her, but she threw her arms round the child

and kissed her. Then she asked the smith to bring out Stella. Ten minutes later she and Mudge, who had mounted Jim's horse, were well on their way to Broughton.

CHAPTER X

Heart o' Mine

§ 1

BARBARA arrived at the castle half an hour after Colonel Scrope's troop had entered with the prisoner. This she ascertained from Matthew, who had been on the watch for her this hour past, wringing his hands and moaning with fear for her safety. But she could not now listen to his lamentations; he helped her to dismount, after which she bade a kindly farewell to the smith.

"I'll never forget you, Mudge," she said with a wan little smile. "Your loyalty to Mr. Fiennes, your kindness to me, have made you and Rebecca very dear to me."

The smith stood by, twirling his hat dejectedly; now he passed the back of his hand over his eyes.

"You don't think, Mistress," he murmured with characteristic diffidence, "that harm'll be done to Master Jim?"

"Please God, no," she replied with a little catch in her throat.

"Few people know," Mudge went on, "what a fine lad he is, for he is shy and likes to talk to the beasts and birds rather than to men. But I know many things that I have sworn to keep a secret.

'Tis only the recording angel up in heaven who'll be kept busy on Mister Jim's behalf."

"And on yours too, Mudge," Barbara rejoined gently. She gave him her hand and he held it between his two rough ones for a moment, fondling it as he would a bird, then he raised it to his lips and kissed it almost reverently.

"God give ye power, Mistress, to do what's right for Mister Jim."

Barbara ran on to the castle after that. She could not speak to Mudge again, for she would have burst into tears.

She found Colonel Scrope in the hall with Captain Lovell. They were on the point of going into the dining-room for supper. She caught the quick look of warning or intelligence that passed between the two men when she appeared, but directly afterwards Colonel Scrope once more assumed that air of paternal benevolence wherewith he had listened to her this very morning.

Before she could put in a word he had come forward and taken her hand, and his voice sounded full of compassion and kindness as he said:

"Dear Mistress, do not make it more difficult for us to do our duty."

"More difficult?" she asked. "What do you mean?"

"I have sent a messenger post haste to Squire Brent," he replied evasively.

"That was kind. But why a messenger to Squire Brent?"

"I thought he would come to fetch you away,

dear Mistress. I could not bear to think of your being here when—when—" He stammered and broke down under her searching gaze. She looked from him to Captain Lovell. The latter appeared chiefly intent on examining his boots.

"When what, Colonel Scrope?" she demanded curtly. "It would be kinder if you were more explicit."

"A soldier's duty is oft a hard one, dear Mistress," he rejoined. "And in this case I fear me that we have no choice."

"You mean?"

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"A spy," he said, "knows what to expect if he is caught in the act."

"Jim was not caught in the act; he gave himself up of his own free will."

"Jim Fiennes happens to be a gentleman. He would not allow us to hang even such scum as that rascal Longshankes for a crime he himself has committed."

"Jim has committed no crime—"

"Save that of being found out," the Colonel broke in somewhat tartly; "whether voluntarily or involuntarily is beside the point. But to be found out is the deadliest crime a spy can commit."

"What do you intend to do then?" she retorted.

"Take the one satisfaction left us to avenge the theft of His Majesty's letters."

She received the blow without flinching. Later in the evening, when Colonel Scrope discussed the interview with Captain Lovell, the two men, officers

and gentlemen both, paid ungrudging tribute to Mistress Barbara's nerve and her sense of dignity. But her cheeks had become the colour of dead ashes, and she waited for a second or two before she spoke lest the tremor in her voice should betray her. Then she said firmly:

"You mean to kill him?"

"We have no option," the Colonel replied.

"You dare not do it!" she retorted.

The Colonel frowned. "Why not?" he asked.

"You know what my lord Essex did threaten? That for every Parliamentarian put to death he would make an example of three royalist prisoners."

"Such an edict does not apply to a spy. And even if he did—"

"Well?"

"We too must make an example."

"In order to gratify your own petty revenge and give a soothing draught to your wounded vanity."

"Mistress," Colonel Scrope broke in hotly, and even Captain Lovell ceased to contemplate his boots and threw her a wrathful look.

"Oh, I know! I know!" she went on impatiently. "I ought not to have said that. A man's life is at stake and when we fight for it we must wear kid gloves. But I'll dare you to search your conscience truthfully to-night, Colonel Scrope, and not to discover the main motive of your hatred for Jim."

"I have no hatred for Jim Fiennes," the Colonel protested drily. "In a measure I admire him, for I'll warrant he did not do his dirty work from

choice, and his courage and daring are beyond praise. But we happen to be at war, fair Mistress, and in war, more than in peace, the loser pays. And now I beg of you humbly, respectfully, to cease troubling your pretty head with this unpleasant affair. God knows I meant to keep all knowledge of it from you. That is the reason why I ventured to send for Squire Brent."

"The Squire can do nothing save to join hands with me in an earnest prayer to you, Colonel Scrope, in the name of humanity."

"Humanity?" the Colonel retorted hotly. "Humanity forsooth? Nay, dear Mistress, you underrate the Squire's loyalty to his King. Squire Brent is an English gentleman of the old school; whoever raises his hand against the King's Majesty is a traitor in his sight; ay, even if he were his own son. Jim Fiennes has deserved death at our hands an hundred times ere this because he is an enemy of the King. Now by his act he has done more to discredit our cause, the King's cause, than a dozen such defeats as Naseby could have done. Nay, dear Mistress, were you not one of us, the daughter of one of my oldest friends, the adopted child of a man I respect, I would strive to shame you for your disloyalty to the King."

"Jim Fiennes is my husband," Barbara cried, and threw up her head with pride as she loudly proclaimed her love. "He is my husband in the sight of God. I am his wife and I love him."

An exclamation of surprise came almost simultaneously from the two men. The Colonel stepped

quite close to Barbara and with a puzzled frown peered searchingly into her face. She returned his look calmly, boldly, and after a second or two he turned from her, muttering an oath between his teeth.

"My God!" he said partly to himself. "I had no thought of that."

"But now that you know—" she pleaded.

"It will be doubly hard."

"For my sake," she went on with passionate earnestness, "you will find a way out."

He shook his head, and the next moment she was down on her knees beside him, clinging to him with both hands.

"You will find a way out, Colonel Scrope," she entreated with a world of passionate appeal in her quivering voice. "You have the power, you will find a way out. Think on it; Jim and I were children together, our parents gave us one to the other in marriage, but destiny kept us apart all these years. But we loved one another all the time. Now our lives are so tightly bound together you cannot touch one without the other. I am Jim's wife. If he dies I cannot live; if you kill him you kill me too."

Captain Lovell, with quiet delicacy, had retired to the furthest end of the great hall. He would gladly have shut his ears to the pleading of this exquisitely beautiful woman, for with every word she uttered, with every piteous cry, she tugged at his heartstrings, and he ground his teeth with rage at his own impotence in face of such overwhelming

grief. He had served long enough under the command of Colonel Scrope to know that the unfortunate girl might pour out her heart's blood at his feet before he would swerve one step from what he would consider the path of duty. Indeed Colonel Scrope had listened apparently quite unmoved to Barbara's passionate pleading. His stern face, set in a thoughtful frown, expressed nothing of what he felt; only the instinctive courtesy of a gentleman prompted him to protest against seeing a woman kneeling before him. With gentle force he raised Barbara from the ground and led her to a chair close by. She sat down at his bidding, but held herself quite upright, her hands grasping the arms of the chair, her head erect, her great, luminous blue eyes shining with unshed tears, following every movement of the man who, she felt, had power of life and death over Jim. Colonel Scrope was striding up and down the long, stately room, his head bent, his hands clasped behind his back. Presently he came to a halt opposite Barbara.

"Dear Mistress," he began quietly, not unkindly, "I entreat you to believe that what you have told me has caused me infinite pain. I swear to you that if it were in my power to find, as you say, a way out of this terrible impasse I would gladly pursue it. But equally solemnly do I swear to you that to me duty is more sacred than any call of pity or friendship. I entreat you respectfully to listen to me," he went on, seeing that Barbara had made a movement as if to speak again. "My duty in this matter is so clear that I would despise myself and

await the condemnation of every man were I to allow sentiment to obscure the issue. I am an officer of the King, Mistress, and Jim Fiennes has done the one act which in my opinion, and in the opinion of all His Majesty's councillors, will irretrievably jeopardise the King's cause by smirching the King's name before his people. What the ultimate consequence will be of the publication of the letters we none of us dare to think; but whatever they are they will be the direct outcome of Jim Fiennes' action. All this I tell you, Mistress, because I wish you to understand how impossible it is for me to listen to any argument or pleading from you. Jim Fiennes' life is forfeit. My intention was to have him shot within the hour."

He paused a moment, his eyes fixed upon the lovely face before him. It was deadly pale to the lips; the straight column of the throat gleamed like white marble against the rich background of the velvet-covered chair; the eyes, dilated and tearless, had in them an unnatural glow. But there was no look of fear in the rigid face nor in the tense attitude, only a settled, passionate determination to fight, to fight to the last breath for a life which was infinitely precious.

A tense silence followed. The distant church clock struck the hour before midnight. For years afterwards Barbara would remember this striking of the hour, and, if she had fallen asleep before then, she would invariably wake at eleven o'clock with the feeling as of a hand upon her shoulder like the cold inexorable hand of Destiny. A mo-

ment or two later Colonel Scrope spoke again, but now his tone was distinctly more harsh and his manner mort curt.

"I think, Mistress," he said drily, "that I have now made it quite clear how useless it is for you to put forward any personal or sentimental plea on behalf of Fiennes. If you have nothing to urge but love, childhood, friendship or what not you may as well plead to these walls as to me. I am a soldier and not a poet. The King's good name is worth more in my sight than your happiness. This is putting it very crudely and I am shamed to have to do it. But I have too great a regard for you to think that you will bear me ill will for treating you as a thoughtful, earnest woman rather than as an irresponsible child who has to be coaxed and cajoled ere she be given a bitter pill. You appreciate that, do you not?"

Barbara nodded in acquiescence, but a frown of puzzlement appeared between her brows, and for the first time since the beginning of this interview a sense of vague terror came creeping into her heart, for she guessed that behind the Colonel's kind if somewhat curt manner there lurked an unswerving decision which would seal Jim's fate and her own.

"But," the old soldier resumed after a moment's pause, "if indeed you consider yourself Jim Fiennes' wife in the sight of God, if indeed you love him and he returns your love, then I can certainly show you the way whereby you may not only serve your husband, even to saving his life, but also serve the

King's cause and earn the everlasting gratitude of all His Majesty's loyal adherents."

"And how may that be, sir?" she asked.

"If His Majesty's letters are returned to me intact by midday to-morrow," the Colonel rejoined deliberately, "Jim Fiennes is free."

With a sudden involuntary gesture Barbara clapped her hand to her mouth. An indefinable cry of hope, excitement, doubt, had almost forced itself to her lips. The return of the King's letters! She had never thought of that. A bargain for Jim's life, which Jim alone could conclude. Would he do it? Barbara did not know.

It is often said that women have not the same fine sense of honour that honourable men have, and a true chronicler is bound to state facts and to leave motives to the judgment of students of history. The fact remains that hope did enter Barbara's heart then and there. Perhaps she was over-ready to open it to this one feeble ray represented by those half dozen magic words: the return of the King's letters. Colonel Scrope had not taken his eyes off her; there was an intent look in his face. Of all things in this world, this was what he desired most: the return of the King's letters. But he was not a psychologist; he did not know Jim Fiennes, and he did not know Barbara. The days of his youth were very far away; perhaps he had never been young, but he had often heard it as an axiom that a woman could always get what she wanted from the man who loved her, provided she wanted it earnestly enough. He would never have thought

of putting the proposal himself before Jim; men do not suggest such bargains to one another, and perhaps at the back of his mind there was the thought that Jim would strike him in the face for it. But in the heart of every man, be he soldier or politician, there always lurks a certain measure of contempt for the enemy's ideals. A man is a traitor when he turns against you; he becomes a convert when he turns against his own side in order to come over to yours. Colonel Scrope would not perhaps have absolutely honoured Jim for agreeing to his proposal, but he would have thought less heinously of him than he did now.

Barbara, after that one involuntary gasp, had neither moved nor spoken. Hope and fear were fighting for mastery over her brain. She had no time as yet to think because her whole soul, her mind, her body, were wrapped in the one idea: the life of Jim. After a moment she said quite calmly:

"It may no longer be in my husband's power to return the letters."

"In his, perhaps not," the Colonel rejoined, "but there are those who employed him to do the dirty work for them."

"You mean the Parliamentarians?"

"I mean most particularly Fairfax."

"General Fairfax? What has he—?"

"Oh, it is a mere surmise. I was only suggesting him because his army has been on the march within fifteen miles from here. They were through Moreton yesterday, and pitched camp just outside Long Compton. Only an hour ago one of my men, whom

I had sent out to get information, came back to tell me that Fairfax was lodging at the 'Four Alls' in Long Compton, and that his army would continue its march south in the early dawn. My informant also gathered that Fairfax had a visitor in the course of the afternoon, a horseman who appeared to have ridden hard, for his horse was covered with sweat, and who, after remaining closeted with the General for about an hour, rode away again in the direction of Broughton. Now, dear Mistress, you will agree with me no doubt that it is easy to put two and two together when they so obviously make four; and it is at least within the bounds of probability that Jim Fiennes has been acting under orders from the traitor Fairfax and that he could now get the letters back if he wished."

Barbara remained thoughtful for a moment or two, then she rose.

"When can I see my husband?" she asked.

"Whenever you wish."

"Alone, of course?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will go now," she said.

"I will conduct you to him."

"Where is he?"

"In the room below the council chamber."

It had been Jim's own room when he was a lad. Barbara knew it well. Many a time had she sat there gazing at the pictures on Jim's hornbooks, of which he had several, and listening whilst he read to her out of his "Booke of Ballads."

She had to walk the entire length of the hall on her way to the west staircase, and did so with a quiet firm step, Colonel Scrope following closely behind her. Captain Lovell rose as she went by, and stood with bent head, not daring to let her see the deep pity which he felt for her. When she had passed out of the hall he gave vent to his feelings by a loud curse. His Colonel turned and gave him a look. The two men understood one another. They felt like executioners who had been forced to apply torture to a woman; but Colonel Scrope finally shrugged his shoulders; he had spoken a true word when he said that the King's good name meant more to him than any man's or woman's happiness.

§ 2

Colonel Scrope accompanied Barbara as far as the landing immediately below the council chamber. Here a couple of soldiers were on guard. At sight of the Colonel they stood at attention. Colonel Scrope himself opened the door which gave on a very low, square room, in which were a narrow bedstead, a table, a case containing a few rare books, a desk, one or two chairs. It looked cosy and comfortable in the soft light of a couple of candles. Jim had always loved it because of the beautifully extended views it gave over the undulating country around and because it had a west window through which would come the last golden glow of the setting sun. As soon as Barbara was in the room the

Colonel closed the door behind her and she found herself with Jim. He was sitting at his desk writing, looking for all the world as he used to do in the olden, olden days when she invaded his sanctum; his slim figure looked boyish, as did his closely cropped hair with just a suspicion of curls over the temples, so different from the flowing locks still affected by the royalists.

At sound of the door he turned, and, seeing Barbara, he rose and with a quick movement picked up the paper on which he had been writing and tore it up into strips.

"I was just writing to you, heart o' mine," he said simply.

At first she could not speak. She had just run up to him and nestled in his arms, with head bent against his breast, feeling the warmth of his kiss upon her hair. After a while she raised her head and looked at him. His face was lighted up with a happy, boyish smile.

"What a happy solution it all is, dear heart," he said; "now I can love you and worship you without a thought of the future."

He led her to a low chair and made her sit down, and he knelt down beside her and held her in his arms, his cheek against hers, his hands clasped tightly round hers.

"Heart o' mine," he murmured, "I never dreamed there could be so much happiness in all the world."

"Jim!" she cried out, her cry choked with her tears.

"Hush, dear heart," he went on and pressed his

lips upon her fingers. "I know! I know! You are young and wonderful and lovely, and perhaps it all seems hard. But, heart o' mine, do you not see how simple, how exquisitely simple, everything is now? With that between us, I could never have come nigh you again. Now your kind heart forgives it all, but if I had gone on knocking about the world, a perpetual reminder to you of what I had done, you would have come to hate me in the end; and that I just could not have borne; it had been worse for me than any death."

She tried to speak and could not; but she felt better now than she had done these hours past, because her tears had found an outlet at last, and it eased her agony of soul to feel them trickling down her cheeks. And she felt so snug, so safe in the shelter of his arms. No doubt he divined that she could not yet trust herself to speak, for he talked on glibly, quite light-heartedly.

"I never should have thought," he said, "that Colonel Scrope was so rare a gentleman that he would give me this heavenly hour with you. In truth I had always thought him to be as hard as nails: just an insentient piece of metal, fashioned to do his duty and neither to think nor to feel. But for this rapturous hour I will bless him, even when I gaze into the barrels of his soldiers' muskets, and as I hope anon to be in paradise, I mean forthwith on arrival to seek out the recording angel and tell him to inscribe Colonel Scrope's name in the golden book because he did make one miserable reprobate supremely happy . . ."

"Jim! in Heaven's name," she cried pitiably, "can't you see that you are breaking my heart?"

She was sobbing convulsively, and clung to him, burying her head on his shoulder. He held her close to him, murmuring gentle, endearing words, like a mother cooing to her grief-stricken child.

"Heart of my heart," he whispered tenderly, "look straight up at me. I swear that I can make you smile, for I am so happy—so happy—that I feel I must be radiating happiness. Until this afternoon I was wretched because I thought that I should have to go from you and yet continue to live—to drag out a miserable existence weighted with the consciousness that you would always look upon me as the enemy of your people and the wrecker of your hopes. But death, my dear one, is for me only a happy solution. I go now—hardly further than I would have gone before, just over the border, that is all—but I go knowing that nothing now will take your love away from me. In the fulness of time it will change perhaps—turn to wistful regret —but it will always be mine; others will come into your life; you are young and exquisitely beautiful, but no one will ever quite take my place in your heart. You will forget the vagabond and only remember the playmate: the man who worshipped you beyond human ken, and whatever else he did in life, kept his love for you pure and undefiled, faithful until death. Heart of my heart," he pleaded, "let me see you smile."

With gentle force he raised her head and made her look at him. His eyes were glowing, his face

had a young, entirely happy look. For a few seconds he gazed into her tear-filled eyes, then pressed his lips upon them.

"I'll not let you die, Jim," she said firmly, as soon as he had released her; "I'll not. And you cannot go from me. You love me, Jim?"

To that question there could be no words spoken in answer, and she went on earnestly:

"Jim, you cannot go from me because I love you and because I could not live without you. Just now I pleaded with Colonel Scrope for your life—"

"Which was a sweet and foolish thing to do."

"No, not foolish. Colonel Scrope is, as you say, an insentient bit of metal, but he is not altogether without feeling. There is one feeling in him which he sets above every thought and every action of his: his loyalty to the King. Listen to me, Jim," she went on rapidly, seeing that he wished to interrupt her. "Colonel Scrope has only one desire in life now: to get back the King's letters."

She was looking straight into Jim's eyes as she said this, and, just for the moment, her own were not obscured by tears, so that she could see his face quite clearly. The boyish light-hearted look in it had faded altogether, and the lines around his mouth had suddenly hardened and chased away the smile. And all at once she knew that she could never speak of Colonel Scrope's suggestion to Jim. She could not offer him that bargain which, now that she was face to face with him, appeared to her in its most ignoble aspect. He had divined it already of course, read it in her quickly averted gaze

when he searched her eyes for her innermost thoughts. But she knew now that to speak of it to him would be to sully her love; and to let him think that she had ever built on his acceptance might dim that wondrous adoration for her which his glowing eyes expressed.

And so the words were never spoken between them, though she knew that he had guessed, because he pressed her very closely to his heart, closer perhaps than he had ever done before, and whispered tenderly:

"Heart o' mine, even a moment ago I did not know how much I loved you!"

She hid her face against his breast and whispered almost inaudibly:

"But—not enough, Jim—for—for *that?*"

And he replied quite quietly: "Too much, my heart, for *that.*"

"Jim!" she entreated. "And if I swore to you that I could not live without you?"

"I would lay me in the dust and kiss your exquisite feet and marvel why such happiness had been granted me."

And whilst, with lips pressed closely to her ear, he poured forth these endearing words which he had treasured in his heart for her all these years, she felt that hope had veiled her face and that it was the greater and purer love that turned the scales of destiny. Jim was lost to her because of his great love; bitter tears welled to her eyes, but she did not try to check them. She could allow

her grief full rein; it was no longer held in check by hope. After that they could only talk of the past: their childhood, their games, their quarrels, his jealousy of Tubal, her pique at his indifference; they talked of the happy days at Broughton and of the bitter ones in the past three years; and of that awful night at Daventry and the horror-filled day at Farndon Fields. It seemed so incomprehensible that they could ever have been enemies; but he had always loved her, and she vowed that in her heart there must always have been a dormant love for him. "Do you remember?" came time and again to her lips, and in very truth at one moment he succeeded in making her smile.

Half an hour later, when the Colonel sent to fetch her, she was comparatively calm, and accepted, without a murmur and without the slightest loss of dignity, his commands that the prisoner must now be left in solitude; the last look that she had of Jim was of him standing in the middle of the room, with the flickering light of the two candles behind him, his tall, slim figure upright, the waving curls upon his temples shot through with light, his face in shadow. But even in that shadow she felt rather than saw the glow of perfect and serene joy in his eyes and the happy smile around the sensitive lips that had given such unspeakable ecstasy to her own. The last word that he murmured before she bade him farewell was an infinitely tender "God have you in his keeping, heart o' mine!"

§ 3

Colonel Scrope, though a hard man, was not altogether without feeling: he certainly had the feelings of a gentleman and these prompted him not to question Barbara while he accompanied her down the stairs and then across the great corridor to the door of her apartments. The church clock was even then striking midnight.

Just before taking leave of her for the night he took her icy cold hand in his and said with quiet earnestness:

"Be assured, dear Mistress, that I will do nothing before the arrival of Squire Brent, and this cannot occur for at least thirty-six hours. So there is still time—ample time; and with all my heart I wish you to succeed."

She withdrew her hand and went quietly into her room. Mistress Leake, in the adjoining room, wearied of waiting for her mistress, was lying on her bed fast asleep. Barbara did not wake her; she had no intention of going to bed. She wanted to think, and she wanted to pray. Oh! to pray above all, if only God in His Heaven would deign to hear.

CHAPTER XI

A Life for an Ideal

§ 1

THREE hours later, at break of dawn and when the waning moon still hung honey-coloured and mysterious in the translucent sky, Master Topcoat, landlord of the "Four Alls" in Long Compton village, was roused from sleep by a loud knocking at his door. He jumped out of bed and put his tousled head out of the open casement and was mightily astonished to hear a woman's voice loudly and peremptorily demanding admittance.

At this hour, I ask you!

Master Topcoat was at first very emphatic, more especially when the nocturnal visitors declared that they desired speech with General Fairfax. This of course was out of the question. Master Topcoat, with his hairy, muscular arms leaning upon the window-sill and his round and highly-coloured face thrust forward, explained the situation curtly and firmly.

"The General," he said, "was awake until a couple of hours ago. Marching all day, reading all evening, surely he could have the night wherein to sleep."

"The General," retorted one of the visitors, "will punish you severely, Master Landlord, for daring to stand in the way when I desire speech with him. Tell him at once that Mistress Barbara Fiennes hath come at this hour from Broughton Castle and that her errand is one of life or death."

The worthy landlord had noted by now that this peremptory nocturnal caller was in truth a very fine lady. For one thing she spoke as one who is accustomed to being obeyed; and for another she had in her hand a purse, which she jingled from time to time while she spoke, and Master Topcoat's ears were so attuned to the jingling of money that with eyes closed he could always tell you whether it was gold or silver that was making the pleasant insinuating noise.

And this time it was gold without a doubt, therefore a matter not lightly to be dismissed from the mind. So, after some obvious hesitancy, the round, red face with its tousled mop disappeared from the casement above, and anon there was a rattle of keys, a clink of chain and bolts and Master Topcoat stood in the narrow hall of his house with the front door wide open bidding the lady enter.

The purse containing at least four golden sovereigns was his reward. He took it with a munching and a smacking of his lips.

"You'd best go up yourself, lady," he said quite glibly now, "for then he wonna blame me. He hasna been abed all this night, burnin' candles all the time, readin' or what not. You mun go up,

lady. It's the door on your right when you go up them stairs."

Before she went up Barbara turned and held out her hand to her companion.

"Dear Master Mudge," she said kindly, "you see we have arrived."

Mudge took the hand reverently, holding it between his rough palms as he would a sacred shrine.

"May God put the right words into your mouth, Mistress," he said; "the whole country-side will bless your name if you can do aught for Mister Jim."

Barbara had roused him from sleep in the first morning hour; he had saddled his horse and accompanied her at her bidding without demur or questioning. When the inspiration came to her to find General Fairfax her thoughts had at once flown to Mudge. He loved Jim, and his escort would be more valuable than Matthew's, whose hot-headed partisanship of the King's cause might be of disservice to her in a country which was entirely hostile. Of personal danger to herself from footpads, night-birds or the marauding rabble that the several armies on the march invariably spread in their train she did not even think. Mudge had a couple of pistols in his holster, and they should be enough to keep any ruffians at bay.

Thus the two of them started out together less than two hours after midnight. Colonel Scrope had said that the Parliamentary army was encamped for the night but a few miles from Broughton and

that the General himself had his lodgings in Long Compton, which was only distant eleven miles from the Castle. If General Fairfax received the King's letters from Jim in the late afternoon there was just a faint chance that he would not send a messenger with them to London before the dawn. That was the eventuality that Barbara had conceived as probable, and when she started out in the small hours of the morning she was only conscious of one sensation, a wild desire to annihilate the space which lay between her and the one man who alone could save Jim.

Whilst she and Mudge rode at full speed westwards, the dawn slowly broke behind them, and on ahead the winding road detached itself from the surrounding gloom. In the east a pale lemon-coloured light rent the grey clouds that hung in silver streaks across the horizon. But for once in her life Barbara had no eyes for the beauty of this midsummer's dawn, none for the delicate tints of jade and pale topaz and amethyst that made of the firmament a gigantic jewelled dome; she had no ear for the first call of wakening birds, the cheery cockcrow, the hymn of morning chanted by all those feathered friends whom Jim loved so well. Indeed she had eyes only for the road, the long white ribbon that still separated her from her goal; she only strained her ears to catch the first sounds of awakening life on upland and valley, for hers was a race against time, a race in which Jim's life would be the prize if she won.

§ 2

Going upstairs, Barbara saw a narrow streak of light peeping beneath the door which the landlord had indicated to her. Before she reached the landing she heard the reverberation of a firm footstep upon a wooden floor, and the next moment the door was thrown open and the General, candle in hand, stood beneath the lintel. The flickering light fell upon Barbara's pale face and her white hands that held up the folds of her heavy skirt. She had never seen Fairfax before this and she looked up at him with the searching gaze of one who comes to plead for life, and marvels if the face, that is a mirror of the thoughts within, seems kind or cruel.

She mounted the last few steps and came to a halt on the landing.

"I am Jim Fiennes' wife, General," she said simply, "and he is under sentence of death."

Abruptly he bade her enter, standing aside to let her pass, and while she went into the room he closed the door behind her. The first glance which she gave into the room showed her a rough deal table littered with papers; one of these, a letter, lay open as if abruptly left lying there, half read. Lying across the table was a heavy basket-hilted sword and belt, and beside these inkhorn, pens, and a pair of pistols.

"Will you not sit?" the General said curtly and with one hand drew a chair forward for her. He replaced the candle on the table, and with slow de-

liberation collected all the papers together into a heap and laid one of the pistols as a paper-weight over them. Then only did he turn to look more closely at Barbara. His glance was uncompromising, almost inquisitorial, but Barbara did not quake under it; she returned his glance frankly and fearlessly, whilst two heavy tears came trickling down her cheeks.

"Tell me," he said more gently.

She sat down, feeling tired out, almost dazed with want of sleep, and he sat opposite to her with his elbow resting on the table, his chin against his hand. She waited a moment to collect her thoughts and to swallow her tears, then she said quietly:

"I saw the theft of the King's letters."

Fairfax made no movement; not even by a tremor of the eyelid did he betray either consternation or surprise. But to Barbara's perceptions, rendered doubly keen by the imminence of Jim's peril, it seemed as if the great man's attitude had become suddenly more rigid, and his attention more fixed. She felt that her soul now stood bared before him; and he seemed, by his searching gaze, to be taking the measure of her loyalty and of her love for Jim. She noted too, and with some degree of pride, that he did not for a moment doubt her word or misconstrue the motive which had brought her thither. He waited patiently now until she was sufficiently collected to tell him just what she had come to say.

"I saw nothing very clearly," Barbara went on more steadily, "because the sun was in my eyes; but I did see a man hanging on a rope outside the

walls of the council-chamber where the King's letters were kept. It was a daring feat; the man hung from the rope sixty feet and more from the ground, then he swarmed up to the roof and was lost to view. Though I realised that no man save one who is adventurous and bold could accomplish such a feat, yet in my mind I jumped to the conclusion that it was Tubal Longshankes whom I had seen."

"Why did you think that?" asked the General.

"Because," she replied, "I thought that I had seen him at Daventry spying upon the King's council, and again at Farndon Fields striving to filch the King's cabinet. It was all because of a scar," she added with a little catch in her throat.

"A scar?"

"Yes. When we were children together—Jim, Longshankes and I—I had a little dog—she bit Longshankes in the hand—it left a scar—it was only yesterday—I knew that Jim had an almost identical scar—on the same hand—"

She almost broke down, but once more succeeded in swallowing her tears.

"Well, then," the General resumed quietly, after he had given her time to collect herself, "you saw the theft of the King's letters; you thought that Longshankes was the thief. What happened afterwards?"

"I called to Colonel Scrope," she replied. "We went to the council-chamber and saw that indeed the letters had gone. Then I denounced Tubal, and Colonel Scrope sent a party of soldiers to apprehend him. But Jim came to hear of this, and he

gave himself up. Now he is at Broughton Castle, a prisoner. And Colonel Scrope will have him shot, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless the King's letters are returned before noon to-day."

Fairfax was silent. Barbara vainly tried to read his thoughts through the mirror of his eyes. But he was just looking at her. Looking as if he would search her very soul. After a few seconds' pause he asked abruptly:

"Why have you come to me?"

"Because," she replied boldly, "Jim's life must be saved at all costs."

"Who sent you?"

"No one," she replied.

"But the proposal came from General Scrope?"

"Yes."

"You did not speak of it to Jim?"

"No! No!" she exclaimed quickly.

"Yet Colonel Scrope told you to speak of it, did he not?"

"Yes."

"And you did not do it?"

"No."

"Why not? . . . Why not?" he reiterated peremptorily after a moment's silence, and then again: "Why not?"

But she could not reply. How could she explain to this stern soldier how she had lain against Jim's heart and, looking into his face, had seen so much courage in his eyes, such steadfastness, so much

grandeur of soul that words had failed her to speak of the ignoble bargain which meant life itself to her?

"You have your answer, Mistress," General Fairfax said more gently, "in your own silence. What you dared not ask of Jim 'twere equally useless to ask of me."

"I could not plead to Jim for his own life," she retorted hotly, "but you who put this shame upon him—"

"There is no shame upon Jim, Mistress," he broke in firmly. "Whatever your own people may say, remember this: Jim acted as he did because he was a soldier and because I commanded. He did his duty without fear and without question. And he will die as he has lived: a noble, selfless gentleman, a martyr to his cause, laying down his life for an ideal."

She listened to him with glowing eyes, then buried her face in her hands.

"God bless you for this, sir," she murmured.

He rose and put a kindly hand upon her shoulder.

"Could you bear Jim to know," he asked, "that you came to me with this proposal? There! You see!" he went on as she shook her head. "You know just as well as I do that Jim mayhap would forgive you because he loves you, but what think you he would do to me when we next met, if I agreed and gave you back these letters?"

"He need not know—" she murmured, feeling for the moment very unheroic, very wretched and entirely broken-hearted, but with a strange sense

of security and of confidence in this man who was Jim's friend and whose integrity and high ideals had made of him a hero to be reverenced and to be trusted. Hardly were the words out of her mouth than she was ashamed of them, but in the kindly eyes which now looked down on her she saw nothing but complete understanding, a sympathy which nothing could shake. He put his hand upon the letters, and began speaking with solemn earnestness:

"When you said just now that Jim's life must be saved at all costs, I might have explained to you that the King's letters were no longer in my keeping, that I had sent a courier to London with them yesterday. That would have been an easy and an unanswerable lie. But knowing you, Mistress, as I have learned to do in these brief moments, I prefer to tell you plainly that I refuse in Jim's own name to purchase his life at such a price. A messenger bearing these letters will leave for London within the hour, and will place them in the hands of Parliament to be dealt with as it desires."

He paused a while, for Barbara with a moan had buried her head in her hands. Then he went on with quiet impressiveness:

"These letters, Mistress, are Jim's gift to the people of England. He bought them by a sacrifice far greater than any ordinary man can possibly estimate. What it cost him, and what his motive was, no one will ever know, save I, his commanding officer and his friend, and I give you my word that until quite recently I was not even aware of the

identity of a man whom I honour and reverence more than any one I know. I commanded him and he obeyed for reasons which I could not divulge even to you. But believe me, Mistress, that though I have seen many a deed of heroism in my day, I have seen none to compare with what Jim has done. Physical bravery is a very usual attribute of healthy manhood, and many a man will risk his life for a cause; but few would risk what Jim hath risked when he filched these letters by my orders. Therefore," the General concluded with great gentleness, "I entreat you to believe that whichever way you and your people may look upon the deed, it was done in a spirit of self-sacrifice which has seldom been equalled, and I would not now shame the man I so greatly honour by rendering that sacrifice worthless."

He had spoken very slowly and deliberately like a man, usually of few words, who, at a given moment, finds himself compelled to give utterance to his thoughts. Barbara had risen to her feet while he spoke and listened to him wide-eyed and tearless. This was the end, and she knew it. Fairfax was not the man thus to speak at length and so emphatically, unless he had weighed every word; nor was he a man to be moved from his purpose. Now, when he had finished speaking, she stood silent, softly swaying like a flower in the breeze and mechanically tapping her hands one against the other.

"Then," she murmured tonelessly, "Jim must die?"

"Ask him," Fairfax retorted, "if he would buy his life at such a price."

But those words were the last harsh words that he spoke to her. From the moment that she accepted the finality of his decision, all that was kind and understanding and fatherly in his loyal nature went out to her in comfort and sympathy. He was an enemy in the sight of her people, but Barbara realised for the first time in her life that a cause which had the support of so many English gentlemen could not be an unworthy one.

There was some mystery in this act of Jim's which she would never fathom. The deed itself must have been intensely repugnant to him, and yet this man, Fairfax, a noble, upright, honourable soldier, if ever there was one, had commanded and Jim obeyed because of an ideal and a sense of duty which must forever remain obscure to her. "It was done in a spirit of self-sacrifice which has seldom been equalled!" These were words spoken by a man who had witnessed many an act of heroism in his day, the man who during that awful fight at Naseby had earned an ungrudging tribute from his enemies. God alone knew which way right lay. On both sides no doubt in His sight. There were ideals on both sides, loyalty, self-sacrifice and truth. How can man be the judge of another's motives? God alone, who reads all hearts, can do that. God who would judge between the King and his people.

Jim and General Fairfax! Here were two men whose ideals were entirely different from Barbara's own, and yet what an example was their conduct

to many who were of her side. She went away with a feeling of respect and of puzzlement: respect for a cause that had roused the enthusiasm of such men as Jim and Fairfax, puzzlement that amongst Englishmen of integrity and truth there could be such warring ideals.

"Then you can do nothing to save the man who sacrificed himself for your cause?" were the last words she spoke before she left.

"Pray to God, dear Mistress," he replied earnestly; "in His hands are our destinies."

She went away broken-hearted because this was indeed the end of all her dreams of happiness. Perhaps she had not realised up to this moment how she had clung to hope, how firmly she had relied on a continuance of that happiness which had only been born yesterday. To have found love and then so soon to lose it seemed like a negation of everything that was holy and benevolent on this earth. To have lain against Jim's heart, to have felt the warmth of his kiss, the ecstasy of his embrace, and after that to envisage the solitude of life-long regret seemed bitterness that was unbearable. How life would go on after this Barbara could not imagine. Women before now had followed their lovers to the grave, so there was that hope left to her, that sense of comfort and of peace. She rode back the way she came, hardly conscious of life. It was a glorious summer's morning, the sky a kaleidoscope of glowing colour; the birds were singing; a skylark soared up, rising almost from beneath Stella's feet. Nature in the prime of her

youth, ecstatic and exuberant, was sending forth a perfect pæan of gladness and of praise. In Barbara's heart was nothing but black misery, a weight of sorrow and an endless vista of tears.

§ 3

After Barbara had gone, General Fairfax remained motionless and thoughtful for quite a long while, his keen, clever face reflecting the sympathy which he felt for the unfortunate woman, as well as his concern for the friend whom he loved and reverenced with all the strength of his loyal nature. But sorrow and concern were not altogether unmixed with an immense sense of relief; ever since Jim had placed the King's letters in his hands the previous afternoon he had felt as if a ponderous burden had been lifted from his soul. Of late in truth he had been greatly troubled with petty worries which had weighed like lead upon his spirits: the jealousy of certain members of the House of Commons who desired to subject him to civilian authority, the distress of his army, the insufficiency of horses and arms, the lack of adequate provisions. But now all these worries had become as trifles in the face of this bundle of letters which he held in his hand—the perfect justification of Parliament against the King, which the people of England would see and read before many days had gone past!

And this great result had been attained by a man who now stood to be shot, in a hole-and-corner manner like a common spy! It was unthinkable!

And yet— The other side—this Colonel Scrope and the power that moved above him—were within their rights. Fairfax was a soldier—above everything else he was a soldier—and owned that the others were within their rights. But Jim—the brave lad! The brave, brave lad! Fairfax almost saw him now before him, as he had done that morning at Classthorpe Hill, dragging his weary limbs up the muddy road, with the wind and rain beating about him, well-nigh broken in spirit as well as in body; and then later in the narrow room of the vicarage at Kislingbury, with cheeks the colour of dead ashes and glowing eyes held down in shame.

Poor lad! Poor lad! Fairfax could almost hear the husky, tired voice begging so desperately: "Let me fight and set another to do this dirty work for you!" Brave, selfless, loyal lad! He had done the work, redeemed his pledge, given the last shred of his honour for one not worth half of him. Colonel Nathaniel Fiennes! The brother! A fine man too. Fairfax in his mind was ready to admit it. A fine man, covered with honours now and lauded to the skies! And then there was the shrewd, clever father—a little hard perhaps where his eldest son was concerned—but how proud he would be if he knew! Nathaniel had always been the best loved, but England herself would take Jim to her heart if she knew! Nathaniel now stood covered with the glory which Jim purchased for him with what is dearer to man than life, whilst Jim was waiting to die like a miserable outcast, having redeemed his brother's honour, surmounted

every difficulty, faced every outrage and the whole gamut of shame!

And now to die like a pariah, with no one but one friend to know why and how he died!

It was in truth unthinkable! And yet . . . !

With an impatient sigh Fairfax turned back to the grave matters which he had in hand. Drawing pen, inkhorn and paper to him, he set to work and wrote a long letter to the people of England's most excellent Parliament. This letter he signed with his name and put with those of the King, and made a neat bundle of the lot, covering them in a linen wrapper. Then, having affixed his seal to the packet, he went in search of Mister Lionel Copley, his Muster Master General, who also had his lodgings in the hostelry. Mister Copley, roused from sleep at this early hour, thought that he was dreaming when he saw the General standing fully dressed before him. The first rays of sunrise came peeping in through the folds of the thin linen curtains. Mister Copley thought that he had overslept.

One word from Fairfax brought him jumping down from his bed.

"These are the King's letters," the General said, holding up the sealed packet.

"Heavens above!" Copley exclaimed. "How did you get them?"

"You may well say 'Heavens above,'" Fairfax rejoined, "for it is God in very truth who hath placed these letters in our hands, and with them given victory to our arms. You, my good Copley,

can go at once to London and place these letters before Parliament."

"When do I start?" was Copley's simple retort.

"At once, of course. Take a troop of horse with you and make for Northampton, and thence for Buckingham. You can pick up fresh horses all the way and do not hesitate to requisition if necessary. God speed you and guard you, for you will be carrying the destinies of England in your wallet."

Copley in the meanwhile was making haste to dress himself. He was a middle-aged man with round, red face and shrewd grey eyes which were almost comical now in their expression of astonishment. All the while that he struggled into breeches and boots he murmured at regular intervals: "Begad, who'd have thought it? What a find, begad! What a find! The King's letters, begad!

"But," he went on when he was nearly ready and passed a horn comb through his hair, "you surely will not let me go, General, without telling me how you got the letters? Every one in London will want to know, begad!"

"All that I wish any one to know," Fairfax said, smiling despite himself at the other's comical eagerness, "I have put down in my letter which I have addressed to the House of Commons. The letters came into my hands yesterday through the agency of a hero who, alas! must remain nameless. Every one in England will have to be satisfied with that."

"But will you not tell me?"

"No more than that."

"But are all the letters there?"

"All those we want. The correspondence with Lorraine for landing foreign troops in England; the offers to the Irish Catholics in consideration of their help to quell the rebellious English; letters to the Queen on subsidies from France. Yes, the letters we want are all there, my good Copley; and if you make good speed they should be in the hands of Parliament by sunset to-morrow."

When Copley was fully dressed Fairfax finally placed the packet in his hands and Copley fastened it securely inside his doublet.

"The destinies of England, Copley," Fairfax reiterated earnestly. It was clear that he hated parting from the letters. "I would take them myself, but I cannot leave my army now. I have an urgent duty to perform and then we must beat Goring and relieve Taunton; but for God's sake guard those letters well, Copley. If you only knew," he concluded with a sigh, "what they cost!"

"The letters are as safe with me," Copley rejoined, "as they would be with you. You know that you can trust me, else you had not thought of giving them in my care. I'll start at once, and have no fear, General, that I'll tarry on the way. And since you will tell me nothing more . . ."

"Nothing, my good Copley!" the General broke in quietly. "God guard you!"

It was daylight now. The servants of the inn were busy about the place; a lad saddled Copley's horse for him and Fairfax watched his friend's de-

parture from the window of his room. Copley's first objective was the camp outside Moreton, where he would muster his troop of horse, but there was no fear of delay, for there was not a single high officer in the Parliamentary army who did not appreciate the importance of the King's letters and who would not rejoice in the thought of seeing them placed before the Houses of Parliament as speedily as possible.

§ 4

It was after Copley had left Long Compton that Fairfax commanded that his own charger be immediately saddled. He got to horse as quickly as he could and, unattended, rode out to Moreton. It was here that Colonel Nathaniel Fiennes and his brother John were lodging at the "Sign of the Horse and Plough" which is on the Foss Way, opposite the church of St. Barnabas.

The General found both officers dressed and prepared to get to horse, as the army over at the camp was making ready for an early start. The sun was well up in the heavens, but the haze upon the horizon line gave promise of a sultry day. The two brothers were being served with ale in the public room when General Fairfax was sighted by the landlord, whose loud and obsequious greetings brought Colonel Nathaniel to the door.

"Is anything amiss?" he asked hastily, for in truth the General's face looked stern and ominous. He

made no reply and went straight into the public room. Nathaniel followed him and at once reiterated the question.

"Your brother Jim," Fairfax replied quietly, "is a prisoner at Broughton and under sentence of death for stealing the King's letters."

CHAPTER XII

Let 'Em Come

§ 1

THERE are moments in life when existence ceases to be living and becomes twin-brother to death. The senses are numb, the limbs move mechanically by sheer volition of the muscles without any reference to will-power, the heart is atrophied and the brain palsied; even pain no longer reaches the nerve-centres, and the soul seems to have fled from the healthless body. Such a moment had come to Barbara after her interview with Fairfax and in after life the next twenty-four hours would appear to her memory as intangible pictures in which she herself had no part, blurred images wherein she saw herself as a spectre moving in the realm of necromancy.

Colonel Scrope refused her any further interview with Jim. He had no doubt counted on the possibility of the King's letters being returned to him, and his disappointment had turned an already irascible temper into a revengeful, almost cruel one. Vaguely he attributed his mortification to something disloyal in Barbara or at best to a lack of enthusiasm on her part, and his hatred of Jim, his desire for vengeance, became aggravated an hundredfold.

There is no doubt but that for the temper of the

men under his command he would have had Jim shot that same morning; the summary execution of a spy was certainly within his rights, but Captain Lovell for one knew that the Colonel had pledged his word to Barbara that nothing would be done till after the arrival of Squire Brent, and it was he who advised his superior officer to exercise that amount of clemency at any rate.

"The men," he said, "are none too pleased at the whole business; a summary execution might bring unpleasant incidences in its train."

"Unpleasant incidences forsooth!" the Colonel retorted roughly. "I would as lief have the lot of them shot if there's any insubordination in the air."

"There is no insubordination in the air," Captain Lovell rejoined, "but the men are Oxfordshire lads for the most part, and the Fiennes have held the land all about here for many generations—"

"All the more shame to them to turn against their King."

"Granted. But it is difficult to make a lot of ignorant yokels see it in that light. For them a Fiennes is a Fiennes whether they be for King or Parliament, and I imagine that they do not relish the idea of shooting one of the family."

"Then you must choose your firing party so as to exclude Oxfordshire chawbacons," the Colonel concluded drily. "But in the meanwhile make Brent's wench understand that she is a prisoner in her own apartments until the Squire comes. I cannot tolerate women's lamentations all over the place

or see a pack of weak-kneed groundlings turned to poltroons by scenes of sentimental farewells."

Captain Lovell allowed the cruel insinuation to pass unchallenged, but in his heart he knew well enough that there was no cause to fear either lamentations or scenes from Barbara. He was a younger man than Scrope and, in him, sentiment had not been wholly atrophied by that iron sense of duty which makes of so many otherwise fine enough men mere fighting machines. Lovell had looked into Barbara's face yesterday, and it was neither weakness nor moral cowardice that he had read in her eyes.

But he thought it best to send his Colonel along a fresh line of thought.

"I saw that rogue Longshankes," he said, "half an hour ago. He reports that the Parliamentary army is still on the march south and would probably make Lechlade to-night."

"Hum!" growled the Colonel in his beard. "And he no doubt came to you fresh from having reported to the traitor Fairfax that the King's Majesty is now in Hereford."

"No doubt, no doubt!" Lovell assented. "The rogue has taken money from both sides and become passing rich in the process. Now if you were to set your Oxfordshire recruits to put some lead into his carcass you would not find them remiss, I'll warrant ye!"

"I may do it later," the Colonel retorted with a cynical laugh, "when I have finished with Fiennes."

"'Twere a pity even then," Lovell concluded.

"The fellow's information is usually accurate, and there seem to be strange rumours going about the villages to-day."

"Rumours! Rumours!" the Colonel broke in savagely. "I am wearied to death of rumours. One of the men had a story that there was a conspiracy in the neighbourhood to seek revenge if we lay hands on Fiennes; I should like to see a pack of beggarly loons trying to drag that spy out of my hands or to intimidate me into a dereliction of duty!"

And Captain Lovell, seeing that his superior officer was in one of his most irascible moods, did not further pursue the subject.

§ 2

At this same hour the bar-parlour of the "Fiennes Arms" presented an unwonted spectacle. Earlier in the day three riders had arrived, their horses covered with lather, their clothes covered in dust, their faces grimy, like men who had ridden furiously. Master Mudge, the blacksmith, happened to be at the inn when they arrived, for he had been escorting Mistress Barbara Fiennes back to the castle and remained at the "Fiennes Arms" close by in case she had need of him again. He and Master Dearlove, the landlord, were there to receive the three visitors and thereafter remained in close parley with them for nigh upon an hour.

After their parley Master Mudge sallied forth in close company with two of the newcomers whilst

the other remained closeted with Master Dearlove in his private parlour.

It was soon after these events that the doings at the "Fiennes Arms" assumed an unwonted character; all those who are acquainted with the inn, which stands outside the castle walls, know it for its reputation of extreme quietude. On summer afternoons it is frequented by neighbouring farmers and labourers who turn into the parlour for a quiet mug of ale or sit on one of the benches outside, with their backs resting against the sun-baked wall, eyes closed, mouth open, lost in the land of nod. But not so on this afternoon. It was impossible to sit in the sun and enjoy a nap or indulge in blameless gossip in peace. The whole place was seething with excitement: lads came running down the roads from every direction, their faces flushed, waving their arms, shouting, "Have you heard?" even before they were nigh.

It was useless to say, "What? What should we have heard?" because though many talked no one put in a coherent word, and the old gaffers who vainly tried to get to their accustomed seats or to get their usual mug of ale from Bess, the landlord's wench, were left to marvel if Broughton or the neighbouring hamlets were suffering from midsummer madness, or if they themselves had fallen asleep as usual and were dreaming this pandemonium which so offended their ears.

"Have ye heard?"

"Well! What?"

At last some coherence was brought into all this

wild talk. Three or four young men were standing in front of the house, shaking their fists into the air, and then grasping one another by the shoulder as if for support in a terrible emergency. "It is awful!" "We shall all be plundered," or else, "Our women and children are not safe!" or again, "'Tis said they are like madmen, wild with terror!"

Just then Tubal Longshankes, over from Shutford, came along on horseback, riding as was his wont, heedless of passers-by, raising a cloud of dust behind him and pushing and jostling those who were in his way without any regard for the safety of their life or limbs. He called loudly for the landlord even before he reined in his horse on the cobblestones of the yard; whereupon the habitual frequenters of the "Fiennes Arms" had another surprise, for they saw Master Dearlove hurry out of his house with back bent and hands rubbed obsequiously together to welcome Longshankes just as if that young ruffian was one of the quality; and it was "Yes, Master Longshankes!" and "No, Master Longshankes!" and "So please you, sir!" that people began to rub their eyes, certain now that they were dreaming. For, look you. Master Dearlove was a man of independent character who would not break his back for any one who did not belong to the Fiennes family, and for him to hold young Longshankes' stirrup—as he presently did—and personally escort him across the yard was enough to make one think that the whole world was turned topsy-turvy.

And Longshankes took Dearlove's obsequiousness

entirely as a matter of course. He threw his horse's reins to the nearest village lad who was standing by, seemingly as ready to do service to the owner of Shutford as Dearlove himself. And Tubal threw a haughty glance on the small crowd that had stopped talking and gesticulating and gaped at him open-mouthed.

"Have you not heard, Master Longshankes?" the landlord asked pliantly in response to Tubal's imperative questioning.

"Heard?" the young man retorted curtly. "No! What was there to hear?"

"Terrible news, Master Longshankes, and our lads know not what to do. We all fear the worst."

"Are you going to speak, sirrah, or are you not?" Longshankes demanded, with his nose in the air and swinging his riding whip as any gentleman might do.

"The King's army has gained a great victory, Master Longshankes!" Master Dearlove said loudly, so that everybody could hear.

At once the groups gathered in more closely around him and Longshankes.

"What nonsense is this?" the latter exclaimed.

"No nonsense, Master Longshankes, I fear me. The remains of the King's army came in contact, it seems, with General Fairfax. The Roundheads gave battle, and it was a rout for them this time more complete even than Naseby was for the King. Some say that General Fairfax was killed; others that Oliver Cromwell himself—"

"Who brought the news?" Tubal demanded curtly.

"Three soldiers of the King's army."

"Where are they?"

"They rode away again. They were men from over Banbury way, and were hurrying thither to warn every inhabitant."

"To warn them of what?"

"It seems that the Roundheads are fleeing like men possessed, lacking both provisions and horses. They are descending on this part of the country like so many locusts, seeking what they can devour, stealing, plundering. We none of us feel that we are safe in our homes, and the lads have assembled here because they mean to seek the protection of the garrison at the castle for themselves and their families."

Tubal Longshankes had come to a halt. He did not go into the inn; his swarthy face mirrored the many crooked thoughts that went chasing one another in his brain. Rumours! Such rumours too! Why, they had been for three years the main sources of his wealth. Information gathered here and carried there meant a matter of twenty pounds at least for him every time.

"What do you advise us to do, Master Longshankes?" Dearlove asked, still fawning upon the wealthy yeoman.

Longshankes stood by, apparently buried in thought. He saw the eager faces around him, some of them quite as servile as that of Master Dearlove, some showing hope, others fear, all of them hanging eagerly upon his advice. His egregious

cupidity was at once on the qui vive! Here was a marvellous opportunity for one of those transactions which went to fill his pockets and increased his carefully hidden hoard: profit—vast profit—could be derived from so many hopes and fears, for both are apt to beget generosity. Longshankes kept up his thoughtful expression, frowning as if in deep cogitation. A clever shuffling of cards, a skilful manœuvre or two and it would not be a paltry twenty pounds he would get for his pains but probably an hundred or even more.

The first consideration was to show belief in the rumours, a belief which he for one did not possess. Elementary reasoning had already told him that the two armies could not possibly have come in contact recently: the King making for Hereford and Fairfax marching south. The three riders who had come and gone so rapidly were either practical jokers intent on a good laugh at the expense of their neighbours, or else they had some ulterior object in view, probably of the same character as that which animated Longshankes' own actions at the present moment. But to foster fears and to smother hopes was the essence of the game which he had played so successfully these past two years, so it was with an air of grave concern that he turned to Master Dearlove and said with an air of kindly condescension:

"I had better talk these grave matters over with you, master landlord, in private. And," he added, turning to the crowd, "if ye so wish, send one or

two elders to represent ye and to converse with us as to the best means to be adopted for the general welfare of the neighbourhood."

A murmur of approval greeted this invitation and three greybeards were at once selected to wait on Master Longshankes in the bar-parlour whilst the younger men remained without, presumably intent on restraining their excitement until they should hear what their betters had decided should be done.

In the parlour Master Dearlove had already served the company with pints of his best ale, and after a few preliminaries and a wetting of throats the confabulation assumed an earnest character.

Master Longshankes was the first to admit the imminence of the danger.

"An army on the run," he said gravely, "knows no law save its own immediate needs. A man with an empty stomach at once becomes a wild beast. He knows neither consideration nor pity. Food and shelter he must have, even at the cost of plunder and outrage, and when he is driven by terror his savagery knows no bounds."

Loud groans greeted this grave warning. And at once the proposition was again put forward to ask for protection from the garrison at Broughton Castle.

"There are only twenty-five men up there," Longshankes objected, "and two officers. I doubt if Colonel Scrope—"

"Our lads would be of service to him," urged Dearlove, who had constituted himself the spokesman of the party, "in case the fugitives were to rush

the castle. They can all wield spikes and clubs."

"True! True!" Longshankes assented dubiously. "But the whole matter is a difficult one. There is the question of provisions—"

"The families would bring their own."

"How many then would want to come?"

"With wives and families there mun well be some two hundred."

"Two hundred!" Longshankes exclaimed with well-feigned horror. "And you are asking me to—"

"Old and young trust you, Master Longshankes. Man and boy have known you since you was in your cradle."

"I know—I know—but I have not the means to do so much for you."

"The means?" It was one of the older men who asked this question, and the others all queried, frowning, "The means?"

"Why, yes," Longshankes replied. "You know what the royalists are. It is money with them, money all the time. Their coffers are depleted; they know not where to turn for funds wherewith to pay their armies. Now this Colonel Scrope . . ."

"He is a hard man!"

"He is; and would do nothing for nothing, let me tell you, and mighty little for a penny. I think I could persuade him; but it will mean money. And, frankly, I cannot spare enough to tempt him."

"Why, Master!" Dearlove exclaimed lustily. "And why in the name o' conscience did ye not say this before. If it's a question of greasing the Colonel's palm—"

"To the tune of at least a pound a head," Longshankes suggested tentatively. In very truth Dearlove's alacrity had opened up a marvellous vista of golden sovereigns before him. "I fear me the Colonel would not agree for less."

The older men tugged at their beards thoughtfully. "We could not pay two hundred pounds," one of them said with regretful decision. And they all shook their heads and sighed. "Well," Longshankes put in persuasively, "what could you pay?"

Master Dearlove scratched his ginger pole and glanced inquiringly at the others.

"We might muster an hundred pounds," he said finally.

Longshankes shrugged his shoulders. This was a disappointment—more especially if the gaffers were not inclined to bargaining.

"Shall I offer one hundred and fifty," he said, "and I will make up the other fifty out of my own pocket?"

"You are overgenerous, Master," one of the old men rejoined and gravely shook his head, "but we could not pay that amount of money. There will be the provisions to collect and they cost something. Now one hundred pounds we can muster and we will. Will ye not see what you can do, Master Longshankes?"

Tubal Longshankes, it may be supposed, did not give in without a good deal more argument. He was at great pains to keep up his rôle of doubtful acquiescence, for in truth he was oversatisfied. An altogether unexpected hundred pounds! It seemed

in truth to have dropped down from Heaven, and all because of some silly rumours which one minute's reflection would easily prove untrue. Ah, well! There was no law to prevent the fool from lining the pockets of the wise, and if, in the end, the rumours did prove to be true, he, Longshankes, would have earned the gratitude of a pack of louts, which also might be very useful at some future time.

In the end he agreed magnanimously to act as go-between between the villagers and the commander of the garrison at the castle; the former to bring all necessary provisions for their own maintenance for one week and to make a payment of one hundred pounds through the hands of Master Longshankes for a week's shelter inside the castle walls. In case of attack the able-bodied men would help to defend the stronghold, and at the end of one week a fresh, mutual arrangement would be entered into, always be it understood through the instrumentality of Master Longshankes.

A highly satisfactory transaction for all concerned, we must admit; more especially as one hundred pounds in cash was collected within the hour, Master Longshankes having condescended to wait in the private parlour until the whole of the money was put into his hands. Finally he went away, promising that in the event of Colonel Scrope proving too grasping and refusing to accept so small a sum as one hundred pounds he, Longshankes, would make up the amount demanded out of his own pocket. He rode away to the accompaniment of loud cheers and protestations of gratitude from the

entire assembly and promised to return with the answer in less than half an hour.

§ 3

There is no news more welcome or more easy of credence than good news. Colonel Scrope, as may be supposed, received that of the King's amazing victory with joy all the more unbridled as rumours of late had rather tended the other way. He had heard indeed that though His Majesty had succeeded in collecting some remnants of his scattered army, the latter was in a pitiable plight, lacking every conceivable necessity and decimated by sickness. Desertions were numerous and frequent, and there had been much talk of late of making terms with the traitors.

When the terrible calamity of the theft of the King's cabinet came as a climax to so much evil news the Colonel, shut in as he was at Broughton Castle, away from the company of his friends and the centres of the royalist movement, had well-nigh given way to black despair. He had nothing hopeful to cling to, only a multiplicity of disasters, out of which Naseby and the theft of the cabinet stood out as absolute cataclysms, from which there was little or no hope of retrieval.

And after black despair, this wonderful news! Believe it? Of course Colonel Scrope believed it, so did Captain Lovell, so would Squire Brent have believed if he'd have been there to hear it. As for the Colonel his drooping spirits rose like a parched

tree under a shower of rain; his temper, which had waxed more and more irascible as day followed day and hour succeeded hour in dreary monotony, turned at once not only to jollity, but even to something approaching magnanimity.

"Yes, let 'em come!" he said in response to Longshankes' suggestions that the dwellers of isolated cottages and hamlets around should seek shelter in the castle from the runaway army. "Let 'em come! And then if perchance some of those traitors should venture here thinking that that reprobate Saye and Sele is at home and would give 'em shelter, why, we can show them the spectacle of the eldest son and heir of that disloyal brood being hung on a gibbet for a spy!"

This idea in truth pleased him more than anything. It was such soothing salve for his wounded self-love: the runaway army of the traitor Fairfax being treated to the scene of the hanging of Jim Fiennes, the spy who had filched the King's cabinet and, but for this glorious victory, had well-nigh ruined the King's cause.

Yes, let 'em come, the men and women of the countryside! They would be all the more welcome as their loyalty was not perhaps as firm as Colonel Scrope would have wished! Let 'em come and see how traitors and renegades, spies and such like muckworms were dealt with, first by God's justice and then by order of the King!

Let 'em come!

CHAPTER XIII

The Passing of the Storm

§ 1

AND when the shades of evening began gathering o'er the ancient stronghold and the tall windows of the west wing ceased to glow with the reflected magnificence of the stormy sunset Broughton Castle became the scene of febrile animation. The castle yard, the gardens, the stables, the lawns, were invaded by an agitated throng, men, women, children, had pitched their camp wherever they could find room to lie or to squat, and they had brought most of their belongings with them. The gatehouses had been thrown open to them by order of the Colonel and they had flocked in by the score, like a herd of hunted, scarified beasts, seeking shelter against the fugitive army whose mad rush and wild excesses imagination had magnified into a devastating scourge for the whole countryside.

The wildest rumours were afloat: Gloucester sacked, Warwick in flames, Oliver Cromwell hanged by the King's orders. His Majesty on his way to London, Raglan's horse in full pursuit of the Roundheads. No news was too far-fetched, too impossible to obtain immediate credence. The noise within the castle walls was like the hum of myriads

of swarming insects, and as night drew on the scene grew more delirious and more weird. It was a dark night. Heavy banks of rolling clouds obscured the sky and from far away came the distant rumblings of thunder. At intervals flashes of summer lightning threw for an instant into sudden bold relief the rising upland beyond the moat and the clumps of elm and oak that looked like giant sentinels guarding an unseen stronghold; and then for the fraction of a second the waters of the moat would appear like an etiolate mirror reflecting the pale, ghost-like corollas of the lilies and their dark metallic leaves. But for the rest the castle lay as if encased in darkness; movement, colour, light, were inside the walls, but all around upland and valley lay sheathed in a sombre pall.

On the north side of the house there was an incessant coming and going. Soldiers and country lads jostled one another, women sat together, squatting in groups upon the ground, with children clinging to their skirts and baskets of provisions, cooking utensils, clothing and bedding in untidy heaps about them. Here and there a fire had been lighted and a cauldron set up on a tripod of sticks for the cooking of porridge or heating of ale.

The fumes of food and spices, of resin and charred wood hung in the heavy atmosphere. The huge iron lanthorn above the gatehouse threw a circle of dim yellow light around and picked out with a dazzling glint the steel casque or gorget of one of the sentinels at the gates or the halberd of a soldier on duty close by. Men moved to and

fro, some of them carrying resin torches that threw a sudden mysterious light on a group of upturned faces or rounded backs, or cast fantastic shadows on the cobble-stones of the yard, shadows that moved and stretched, elongated and retrenched, like restless, murky ghosts striving with long, gaunt arms to reach the castle walls. The heat was intense. Children cried, cuddling against their mothers, fretful and terrorised by the oncoming storm; the women threw aside their shawls and sat hugging their knees with bare hands and arms that shone like metal when touched by the flickering light.

In full view of the gatehouse a hastily improvised gibbet was being erected with long, grim arm, pointing toward the majestic ancestral home of the man who was about to die a felon's death. Whilst a couple of soldiers were at work upon the hideous erection half a dozen more stood on guard around it, impassive and sullen, leaning upon their halberds, striving not to hear the taunts and gibes that were hurled at them by the crowd.

Every one knew for whom that gibbet was being erected. The story had already got about that a Fiennes, the eldest son of my lord Saye and Sele, accused of spying, was to be hung like a common thief—'twas said by order of the King, but this no one believed. Would the King order the son of so great a lord to be hung? No! 'Twas because these royalists had gotten Broughton Castle and did not want to give it up again. . . . Never again . . . and so they were putting Mister Jim to death now, meaning to follow on with Mister

Nathaniel and Mister John, until not one member of the Fiennes family remained alive to dispute the royalist claim to the castle. This was the tale that was freely bandied about and discussed whilst the hammer blows of the working carpenters echoed against the castle walls and the distant roll of thunder made accompaniment to their work.

And to think that men had been found to do this dirty work. Men! Oxfordshire men, whose fathers and grandfathers and more before them had been in the service of the lords Saye and Sele for countless generations. And if not Oxfordshire men, then men from the neighbouring counties! Men! Nay, not men! Muckworms, mudlarks. That's what they were! And who was going to put the rope round Mister Jim's neck, they would like to know.

The women were louder in their taunts than the men. Mister Jim indeed, whom they had all known as a lad! One who would not himself have harmed a squirrel, and who would care for a dog or a horse more than most men would care for their wives or children. Who was going to put the rope around Mister Jim's neck, the women wanted to know.

Such words flew across the stately precincts of Broughton Castle as had never been heard by its majestic walls before, epithets that caused the soldiers around the improvised scaffold to grasp their halberds with a savage clutch and to spit on the ground with sulky rage. And now, when the summer lightning flashed upon the scene on this side of the stronghold, there where the crowd was thick-

est, it revealed more than one bare fist raised in provocation or menace.

Captain Lovell, who made a tour of inspection all over the castle grounds soon after the clock in Broughton Church tower had struck ten, had more than one injurious epithet flung at him out of the darkness. He thought it prudent to take no notice, but when later on he met Colonel Scrope he gave him a grave word of warning.

"God grant nothing further come of it," he said, "but frankly I like not the business. You have the right to shoot a spy, but, damn it, sir, you cannot hang a gentleman!"

"If a gentleman chooses to do the work of a spy he must take the consequences," the Colonel obstinately retorted. "I say that Jim Fiennes shall hang! Hang, I say! So scurvy a reprobate deserves no better death."

"The feeling among the people here . . ."

"The feeling among a lot of ruffianly loobies is not like to deter me from my purpose," Colonel Scrope broke in irritably, "and who are you, Captain, I'd wish to know, that you dare to dispute my orders? I'd as lief clap you in irons as not for indiscipline."

"I would not think of disputing your orders," Captain Lovell rejoined quietly. "I merely ventured to give you a full report of what I've just experienced in my rounds, and also a humble word of warning."

"Warning, sir? Warning be damned. And you too, sir, you be damned. As for Jim Fiennes, I'll

hang him within the hour, and so much for your warning. And if you or any one else dares to interfere again, then Jim Fiennes won't be the only one to dangle on that gibbet. I tell you, sir, that now that God hath done justice on this earth at last and His Majesty the King hath gained a signal victory I want to see every traitor who has ever taken up arms against him or defied his will go the same way as Jim Fiennes will go presently."

It was obviously both unwise and useless to say anything more. Colonel Scrope was one of those men whose tempers grow in obstinacy under contradiction. Perhaps in his innermost heart he was not altogether satisfied with himself, perhaps his conscience pricked him from time to time; but these prickings only made him more stubborn and more impervious to reason. He felt himself strong enough to defy public opinion, and had the professional soldier's withering contempt for the mere civilian. In his mind, as soon as he heard from Longshankes the news of the King's victory and the helter-skelter flight of the Parliamentary army, he had planned the effect of showing to both sides what a loyal subject could do to avenge the insult put upon His Majesty by the theft of the compromising letters. His own side would commend him and pardon any excessive severity in the imminence of the peril; as for the traitors, the sight of so fine a gentleman as the son of Lord Saye and Sele being hung as a common thief would be a wholesome warning against further contemplated treachery.

§ 2

Those who actually saw Jim when he was led out to execution vowed that he looked more like a schoolboy about to start on a holiday than like a man who was on the point of facing death. His eyes had in them that spiritual look which comes when pictures of this earth have been completely erased and the gaze is turned towards seeing exquisite visions of the past and glorious vistas of eternity. His lips were smiling, as if still savouring the kisses of his beloved.

Life in those days was cheap no doubt: men died or dealt death freely without endowing it with attributes of tragedy, but with Jim it was something more than just holding life cheaply. Circumstances had proved too strong for him; duty had been accomplished and his pledged word redeemed, but both had been the instrument that sounded the death-knell of that happiness of which he dreamed. Without Barbara life could be nothing but the dreariest monotony, a perpetual longing that never could be assuaged. Was not death with Barbara's kisses still warm upon his lips, her perfect image ever present before his eyes, a thousand times sweeter?

Colonel Scrope, wearied of incipient mutiny, of murmurings and threats, had ordered that the spy be hung at midnight in the castle yard. And as the distant clock struck the hour, a roll of drums announced the grim procession: a party of halberdiers with half a dozen musketeers and with the prisoner in their midst came out of the castle and

advanced into the centre of the yard. The darkness around was intense, but here between the gatehouse and the castle walls the flickering flames of resin torches threw a lurid, yellow light about. The storm-laden atmosphere was heavy and oppressive and a smell of sulphur and baked earth hung in the air. A dull sullen silence had succeeded the turmoil of a while ago; the women and children, tired out with exertion and excitement, had drawn back for shelter against the castle walls, and there squatted against the stone, with their arms around their shins, their heads buried between their knees, trying to turn weariness into sleep. Only some of the women, more alert or less indifferent than the rest, would now and then look up as the men jostled by and send a taunt or a complaint through the murky air. The men, shamefaced and sullen, did not respond. The sense of tragedy weighed upon the most ignorant; and the feeling of shame kept them all tongue-tied.

Up to the very last moment no one thought that this would be possible: a Fiennes hung like a common thief in full view of his ancestral home! But now it had suddenly become real. The gibbet, the soldiers on guard, one of them busy with the final horrible preparations! And now Mister Jim slowly mounting the steps of the grim erection. Mr. Jim in the flesh, but truly not in spirit; there were some there who, though they were uncouth and ignorant, knew well enough that Mister Jim's gentle, loving spirit was not really there; it was somewhere away, communing with the angels.

He reached the top; every one could see him. His eyes were fixed on the stately home which he had loved so well; they pierced the majestic walls through to the noble room that overlooked the rose-garden, the room that all day was kissed by the sun and in which rested as a jewel the most perfect of God's works. Every one could see him and every one could see that the man who fumbled with that horrible rope could scarce move his fingers, for they trembled so, and that the soldiers who stood on either side of Mister Jim held their lips tightly pressed together lest they should fall a-cursing.

Now Mister Jim was on the top of the platform. All eyes were turned on him, but few saw him clearly because their vision was dimmed by a mist of tears. A current of air rocked the old lanthorn where it hung on a post close beside the gallows, and from far away the thunder rumbled dully. The silence for a few seconds was dense; sobs were stilled and blessings on the dying man were murmured inaudibly. Then all of a sudden a voice rang out clear and commanding through the stillness of the night:

"Which of you lads will dare to lay a finger on Mister Jim?"

And immediately another continued equally loudly and more peremptorily still:

"Eternal shame on him who first dares to touch a Fiennes save in respect and friendship."

And the first voice took up the call:

"Be the hand withered that dares to touch the son of my lord."

The soldier with the rope had paused in his gruesome task; his nerveless fingers were trembling as with ague. The two men who stood one on each side of Mr. Jim vainly urged him to make haste.

Out of the crowd a murmuring rose, scarce distinguishable yet from the distant rumblings of thunder, but it rose in growing cadences in which the words "A Fiennes! A Fiennes!" were only clear at first.

Whence the two voices had come no one knew: from somewhere out of the darkness, and for the first few moments superstitious awe kept tongues and limbs paralysed. It seemed as if God was interfering in this horrible thing, seeing for himself that such an outrage was not consummated. But when the first voice rose once more, ringing clearly as a bell and shouting proudly: "Well, lads, will ye stand by and see a lot of strangers lay hands on Mister Jim?" they knew the voice at once.

"Colonel Nathaniel, for sure," somebody cried out of the crowd.

"And Mister John!" exclaimed another. "How did they get here?"

"Which is it to be, lads?" the lusty voice went on with joyful confidence. "Is this shame to rest on Oxfordshire forever?" And at the same time two men were seen to use their fists so vigorously against the nearest halberdiers that these were unable to hold their ground; they gave way a step or two, enough to enable the two men to push past them and to scramble helter-skelter up the platform of the gallows. And here they came to a halt,

facing the crowd. Every one could see them, for the light of the old lanthorn lit up their eager, streaming faces. Every one recognised them, for who in Oxfordshire did not know the sons of my lord Saye and Sele?

"Now then, lads!" and it was in very truth Colonel Nathaniel who spoke, and he had a pistol in each hand. "Now then, lads! Just make these royalists understand that a score of Broughton fists are as good as all their muskets and halberds when 'tis a case of getting a Fiennes out of their clutches."

Then in truth was the stillness of the night dispelled in a terrific uproar. Every man scrambled to his feet, and at once began to shout, as men will shout when pent-up excitement is suddenly given free rein. They had been sullen, wretched, shamed for hours, hungry too and vaguely frightened. Now everything was forgotten: advancing armies, possible dangers, rumours of defeat or victory. Everything. A weight was lifted from every man's shoulder and every man shouted at the top of his voice, proclaiming to the universe that he cared nothing for King or Parliament, that he was free to use his fists in defence of Mister Jim, the son of their own lord.

"So here goes, soldiers! And see which of you first dares to lay hands on Mister Jim!"

To proceed with the hanging of a man when a hundred or more menacing fists are raised around and about is an impossible task. The soldiers in the neighbourhood of the gallows could not attempt

it. Be it at once admitted that but few of them had their heart in the business. Those few who came from the neighbouring counties did make a show of a stand and used their halberds to some purpose, for there were several broken heads within the first few minutes of the fray; and there were half a dozen skilled musketeers amongst them. But before these had time to get into position and to shoulder their arms Colonel Nathaniel was at them, holding up a pair of pistols.

"Down with the muskets!" he shouted. "The first man who shoulders his musket is a dead man! Down, I say!"

Mister John was beside him; he too had a pistol in his hand and one in his belt. He it was who thrust a sword into Mister Jim's hand and cried gaily:

"Wake up, Jim! You are not dead yet. Save yourself while we talk with these fellows here."

Wake up! That was in truth the right word to use, for Jim had been dreaming. His clear, boyish face looked more puzzled than relieved. He was as serene now as he had been five minutes ago when the soldier behind him was preparing to throw the rope round his neck. He took the sword from his brother, but did not attempt to use it, only looked on at the wild spectacle below him as if amused at seeing the musketeers throwing down their arms and the halberdiers using their unwieldy weapons with so little purpose.

After that the scrimmage became general; the musketeers threw down their arms, but the hal-

berdiers put up a good fight. Blows rained thick and fast, and the noise was deafening. Every one shouted, and those who were in the rear shouted more loudly than those who were busy fighting. As for the women, their shrill cries soon broke into laughter, for they soon realised that Mister Jim was not to be hung after all and that their men, more numerous and more purposeful than the garrison of Broughton, were already getting the upper hand in the fight. Soon indeed what halberds and muskets had remained whole were in the hands of the Oxfordshire lads who had been foremost in the scuffle. The soldiers were disarmed and helpless and perhaps not altogether unwillingly so; had they followed their own inclination most of them would from the first have shouted: "A Fiennes! A Fiennes!" with the crowd of yokels, and would have rallied round those three brothers up there, who represented for them everything that they had honoured and reverenced in the past. Military discipline was but a thin veneer, beneath which allegiance to my lord Saye and Sele and respect for my lord's family was of unassailable solidity. In the scuffle the veneer had been knocked away even while the call of duty was, like their Colonel's voice, drowned in the din. They did not look behind them where Colonel Scrope and Captain Lovell, their sergeant and four of their comrades were vainly striving to forge their way through the crowd, and alternately chided, admonished, swore and threatened. They only looked up to that grim erection where the gallows' arm still pointed to the castle

walls and the old lanthorn threw its dim yellow circle of light around. There they could see the three men: Colonel Nathaniel and Mister John still looking very fierce and determined with pistols in their hands and standing like bulwarks in front of their brother whom they had so cunningly and bravely saved from death; and Mister Jim, like the simple lad he was, with a quaint smile round his lips and standing there quite still and serene just as if he were waiting. Waiting.

"Save yourself, Jim," Colonel Nathaniel said once or twice, and Mister John kept reiterating the same thing, "Save yourself; Dearlove or Mudge will look after you, and you will find your horse at the smithy."

But Mister Jim did not go. He just held his sword in his hand and waited. Waited for what?

§ 4

Colonel Scrope and Captain Lovell had sat in the hall long after they had finished their supper. The Colonel would not admit even to himself how much on edge his nerves had been ever since he had given the peremptory order that Jim Fiennes was to be hung at midnight. In Captain Lovell's silence the senior officer read both reproach and unequivocal blame, but, secure in his own interpretation of duty, he never even thought of a respite for the man who had done the King's Majesty so grave an injury.

The hours sped by leaden-footed. Not even after

the débâcle of Naseby had Colonel Scrope felt so despondent, and even the thought of the crushing defeat of the Roundheads, the rumour of which earlier in the day had so greatly cheered him, failed to rouse him from his despondency. Soon after eleven o'clock Tubal Longshankes arrived at the castle. Captain Lovell was for throwing him into the moat, but Colonel Scrope, wearied of his own thoughts, would have welcomed at this hour a visit from the devil himself.

So Longshankes was admitted into the hall. He came in jauntily, as had been his wont of late. One hundred pounds in his pocket had put him into a rare good humour and made him eager for more gain. His brain was inventive, and feeling that the rumour of the Roundheads' defeat was his trump-card, he enlarged upon it, embroidered the story, gorged himself with his own rodomontades. Like an artist who works upon his picture, adding detail here and there until the completed whole is satisfactory in his sight, so did Tubal elaborate incidents in his story, sinking deeper and ever deeper into a quagmire of lies, until Colonel Scrope himself began to wonder whether so much good fortune could indeed be true. He listened, frowning, already vaguely puzzled, whilst Tubal spoke of the utter rout of the Parliamentarians, of Ireton killed in action, Cromwell fleeing for his life, Fairfax wounded and seeking shelter in a neighbouring farm. Nay, so far had Longshankes' inventive powers carried him, and so far his greed of gain, that he now offered to deliver one or more of the great

Parliamentary generals into Colonel Scrope's hands for the modest sum of fifty pounds apiece.

To this the Colonel readily agreed, and the bargain was concluded then and there to the satisfaction of both parties, even though Scrope added with a certain grim significance: "But I'll have you remember, fellow, that if I find you out now or at any future time in the selling of false information I will shoot you like a dog with mine own hand."

Tubal's protestations of loyalty were drowned by the uproar from outside which at last penetrated the castle walls. The Colonel jumped to his feet. Longshankes, with so many odds against him, turned livid with sudden fear. Just then Captain Lovell came running down the stairs; from the windows of his apartments he had watched the scene in the castle yard, not conscious at first of its full significance. But as soon as the free fight began, and he saw those two men whom he did not know scrambling up the platform of the gallows and brandishing pistols, his one thought was of duty, which in this instance consisted in trying to keep those men together whose loyalty was unquestioned. Alas! there were but few. Even while the tumult around the gallows grew more uproarious, Captain Lovell guessed that some of the garrison had already thrown down their arms. He had been long enough at Broughton to appreciate the hold which the name of Fiennes had upon the local recruits, and he was not under the same delusion that obsessed Colonel Scrope, that discipline would hold the soldiers to their duty.

He and the Colonel made quick haste to buckle on their swords and to snatch a couple of pistols; unfortunately it was the most loyal among the garrison who had been sent to preside over the hanging of Jim Fiennes and the dozen men who were kept inside the castle were just those Oxfordshire yokels whom both the officers knew to be untrustworthy. However, there was Sergeant Toogood and three or four men from Buckinghamshire whom Scrope's sharp words of command had already rallied about him, and it was this little party, headed by the Colonel and the Captain, who set out resolutely to cow the unruly crowd.

But they could not go many steps beyond the entrance door, for the crowd, having disarmed the soldiers and taken possession of the gallows, had now turned its attention to the castle, and, hurtling, shoving, pounding along, they obstructed the way, and the Colonel and his guard found themselves forced to retreat back into the hall. The crowd poured in in their wake like a human avalanche and soon the small defending party found itself thrust back to the further end of the vast hall. Here the officers, with swords drawn and pistols cocked, made ready to hold the throng at bay, and indeed Colonel Scrope was getting his breath in order to harangue those ruffians ere he put a charge of lead into the foremost of them, when he suddenly found himself attacked from the rear; his sword hand was clutched vigorously by the wrist and the pistol wrenched out of his hand, whilst a harsh voice close behind him said firmly:

"'Tis no use, gallant sir. The castle is ours. We are six to your one and there's no shame in surrender."

The Colonel cast wild, wrathful eyes about him. He saw that his sergeant and men had been thrust back into the wide window-embrasures by a score of yokels armed with the halberds and muskets of his own soldiery, whilst Captain Lovell was in a like plight as himself and was even then being relieved of his pistols. Two men appeared to have engineered this rear-action, having brought their small force round by one of the side entrances of the castle. The Colonel, glaring from one to the other, noted that they wore swords, that they had pistols in their belts and that they bore themselves like gentlemen of quality. In very truth resistance would have been futile. The crowd was pressing forward; the few loyal soldiers of the garrison were disarmed and helpless; Colonel Scrope and Captain Lovell had nothing but their swords wherewith to hold half a hundred or so screaming, excitable yokels at bay; and the two leaders of all these ruffians were armed to the teeth.

When the Colonel and the Captain, realising the hopelessness of the situation, sullenly yielded up their swords, the crowd gave a lusty shout of triumph:

"A Fiennes! A Fiennes!"

"Who are ye?" the Colonel cried fiercely, and turned his eyes, bloodshot with rage, on his assailants. "Who are ye who dare commit such an outrage?"

But before the other could give reply Tubal Longshankes, who was cowering in a projecting angle of the wall, gave a feeble cry

"Colonel Fiennes, as I am alive!"

"Nathaniel Fiennes, in truth," the Colonel went on, his voice husky and choked. "I might have guessed. What mean you, sirrah, by this—by this outrage—?"

"That this castle is ours for the time being, sir," Nathaniel replied, "and you and the gallant Captain are our prisoners."

"This castle yours?" Scrope retorted with a harsh laugh. "And pray do you and these louts propose to hold it against the King?"

"No, sir, we do not; for we know that this country still holds with the King. At dawn we leave."

"Then how dared ye to come?"

"We came, my brother John and I," Colonel Nathaniel replied slowly, "because of a debt which all of us who bear the name of Fiennes owe to my brother Jim; it is a debt which I, his chief debtor, can never hope to repay, not even by saving so brave a gentleman from the crying indignity which you were about to put upon him."

"A damnable spy—" the Colonel cried fiercely.

"You may call it that, sir, nor are we here for wordy warfare. But let me tell you this: General Fairfax ordered me in the name of England to free my brother Jim. He could not march his army against this castle, even for so worthy a cause, but he bade me accomplish the will of God. I prayed

for inspiration, and God commanded me to devise the false rumour of fleeing armies, of victories for the King and defeat for Parliament, the rumour which secured for the two hundred ignorant yokels whom we needed for our purpose, admission inside this stronghold!"

"It is false!"

"It is true, sir. There is no flying army. No defeat of our forces and the only victory that we claim is that gained by these stout Oxfordshire lads who would not see a Fiennes die a malefactor's death."

"A tissue of lies," the Colonel retorted, obstinate to the last. "'Tis all false, I say, false—"

"Look, sir," Colonel Nathaniel retorted, and pointed to the shrinking figure of Tubal Longshankes in the angle of the masonry, "the man who brought you the news, even whilst his reason rejected it as false—the man who lined his pockets by urging on the scare—doth he look like a man who hath spoken the truth?"

Instinctively Scrope turned to look the way Nathaniel Fiennes was pointing; his face, hitherto crimson with choler, became livid in a white heat of anger.

"I told you I would shoot you like a dog," he cried hoarsely, and before any one there could stop him he had snatched the pistol out of Nathaniel's belt and fired point-blank at Tubal. The latter had uttered one awful terrified shriek which ended in a death-rattle as he gave a half turn, threw up his arms and fell headlong on the ground. It was John

who had immediately darted forward and snatched the smoking pistol out of Colonel Scrope's hand. In the crowd the women screamed, but more from excitement than horror. Tubal Longshankes was hated in the neighbourhood; one or two perhaps were sorry for his mother, but most of the men here had been wont to prophesy that Tubal would end on the gallows.

"'Tis he who hounded down Mister Jim," some one said audibly.

"Then it serves him right!" declared others. "'Twas a pity to have cheated the gallows. But Colonel Fiennes said quietly: "There are others as guilty as this skunk. And now let there be no more bloodshed this night. God's justice is manifest; let no man stain his soul with further guilt."

"You damnable, canting, Psalm-singing hypocrite," the Colonel muttered between his teeth, "when next we meet—"

"'Twill still be as gentlemen, I hope," Nathaniel broke in simply. "In the meanwhile I have your word, sir, that you and Captain Lovell will remain here quietly until morning? By the time that the waters of the moat reflect the rays of the sun my brothers and I will be far away and all these lads and their families will have returned quietly to their homes."

"You have my word, sir," Colonel Scrope replied sullenly, "and Captain Lovell's too, I imagine. We have no option and only yield to brute force."

"We know," Nathaniel continued with stilted formality, "that Colonel Scrope yields to none in

courage and gallantry. Have we your permission, sir, to bid you good night?"

"Nay, not good night! To hell with the lot of you, the whole brood of the Fiennes, and that accursed spy."

The Colonel sank into a chair; resting his elbows on the table nigh, he buried his face in his hands. Nor did he move a muscle whilst he heard Nathaniel Fiennes and his brother John alternately haranguing, comforting, admonishing the throng, who in truth had need of much assurance and of a great deal of cajoling before it was finally knocked into their brains that there never had been any battle, that there was no starving, fleeing army to fear, and that the whole scare had only been invented for the purpose of gaining admittance into the castle so as to rescue Mister Jim from a hangman's rope. It all took time. Colonel Scrope sat on, sullen and motionless. Captain Lovell paced up and down the top of the hall, with his hands behind his back, not altogether dissatisfied with the turn of events. Tubal Longshankes' dead body had already been removed and the sergeant and small body of royalist soldiers confined to the attic upstairs.

Slowly, in groups of three and four, the crowd filed out of the hall. The argument which had finally persuaded them that all was well and that their purpose had been accomplished was the assurance given to them by Colonel Nathaniel that Mister Jim was safe and still waiting beside the gibbet to shake them all by the hand.

§ 3

But when at last they all found themselves once more in the castle yard, there was no sign of Jim. They had last seen him standing beside his two brothers, serene, smiling, a sword in his hand, and with an expression on his face as if he were waiting —waiting for something—waiting for what? No one could tell.

What Jim was waiting for was solitude, the walls of darkness to close in about him. He waited whilst the crowd pushed and jostled and fought; he waited whilst they overcame the soldiers, disarmed them, took their muskets and halberds. He waited whilst his brothers, anxious about his ultimate safety, urged him to look to himself and to put as quickly as might be several miles between him and these castle walls. He waited until the crowd, wearied of knocking the soldiers about, turned and veered toward the castle and his brothers gathered a small band of resolute lads together and led them round to the rear of the building; then, when he saw a sea of backs before him, he unhitched the old lanthorn and extinguished its light. And thus did darkness enfold him while the crowd continued to push and jostle and to shout.

At last he was alone. Lightly he sprang to the ground and plunged deeper still into solitude and darkness. He skirted the castle walls and entered the rose garden through a gap in the yew hedge. Darkness and solitude all round, only in one window a flickering light. What a climb up to that win-

dow behind which she wept and prayed! What a climb up to a paradise of which neither he nor she had even dared to dream!

Barbara neither wept nor prayed. She was past weeping, past praying. Misery and grief had made of her an insentient thing. She just lay along the sofa, wide-eyed, hardly breathing, staring, staring into nothingness. The casement was open and the wind caused it to swing gently on its hinges with a soft tap-tap and a scarce audible sound that was like a moan. She lay there numb, dull-witted, staring, staring and hearing that tap-tap of the casement latch which was so like the hammering of inhuman fingers against her aching heart.

At what precise moment earth was transformed into heaven she never afterwards knew. She had seen nothing, heard nothing, not even the tap-tapping of the casement latch, for some time, but presently a current of air blew her hair about her face and almost extinguished the candle which flickered feebly in its sconce on the tall chimneypiece.

And then she was in Jim's arms, and his lips were pressed to hers, to her eyes, her throat, her hands, and she lay against his breast thinking that God was good and that she was dead.

"You're alive, heart o' mine!" he said in response to her thoughts which she had deemed unspoken, but which he must have culled from the murmur of her lips. "And so am I," he added with a happy laugh. "And is not life good?"

Nor would the most veracious chronicler dare to put on record what passed between these two during

those first few moments of reawakened hope and blissful certainty. Down in the hall below men still wrangled and gave vent to their own passions of spite and vengeance and hatred; but here in the perfect peace of semi-obscurity, with the midnight air gently stirring the window curtains, and with the casement's soft tap-tapping marking the flight of thrice happy time, the passion that reigned supreme was love, the words that were whispered were a foretaste of heaven. And on the horizon far away the storm clouds were rent, and little by little the unseen mighty hand swept them from the face of the sky. Slowly the dawn broke, serene after the storm, and the morning light came creeping into this earthly paradise picking out two pale yet radiant faces clinging cheek to cheek and two pairs of eyes wearied yet glowing with happiness.

Barbara for many hours after this did not wholly wake to the full consciousness of bliss, even though Jim midst tears and laughter did presently relate to her in detail all the events of this night. Whenever he kissed her, which we may suppose was mighty often, she fell back into a dream-like state, and when he whispered, "Heart o' mine," she was still sure that she was in Paradise. What did political differences matter? What cared she now for divergence of views, for ideals that were alien to hers? What did anything matter save that Jim loved her and that she belonged to him, heart and soul and body? The exquisite words spoken in self-abnegation thousands of years ago had their true

significance for her now: his people should be henceforth her people, his God should be her God. Let others war and quarrel, let others fight over ideals, her ideal was life with Jim, his happiness would be her goal. The suffering through which both of them had passed since love was first revealed to them in the woods had sanctified love and confirmed them in the renunciation of everything except what pertained to love. On that afternoon when Jim bade her farewell it might have been forever; but since then they had both gone through the purifying fires of pain; they had both looked death closely in the face and learned that his grim embrace would be easier to bear than life without one another. Now death had passed them by. Life held out both hands to them and whispered of happiness and love and of perfect communion of soul and spirit. And love and happiness and communion laughed at political dissensions as mere crumpled rose leaves in a bed of down.

"Will you not cease to love me one day, heart o' mine," he asked, "because of what I've done?"

"Even if my body were in the grave," she replied, "and my heart had ceased to beat, I would still love you, Jim, with my soul."

Nor did she once question him about that deed —the stealing of the King's letters—which might have parted them forever and yet had been the means of bringing them together. It was only subsequently when General Fairfax himself told her the full history of Jim's sacrifice to save his brother's

life and honour that she came fully to understand her husband's character. It was the selflessness of it that appealed to her, the complete forgetfulness of self for the sake of family and kindred. She could have worshipped him for that and for his complete loyalty and truth. But for the time being she neither questioned nor judged; all her own beliefs, judgments and ideals she offered as a willing and full sacrifice on the altar of her love.

Anon Jim gathered her in his arms and carried her across the corridor and down the staircase out into the open; the castle yard at this hour was full of bustle and noise. The order for evacuation had just been given. The men were mustering up, the women bustled about gathering their belongings about them; children, roused from sleep, were crying; chains rattled, metal clanged against metal, voices were raised in command or impatience. Jim carried Babs to the old willow tree beside the moat. In the boat the cushions still lay piled up, just as Barbara had left them an eternity ago; they still bore the impress of her body where she had rested upon them, dreaming, on that hot afternoon.

He laid her down gently upon the cushions; then he took the oars and rowed her across the moat. The sky in the east was of a pale shade of citron with streaks of clouds across the horizon the colour of amethyst. Nature was still asleep; even the birds had not yet begun to twitter. They stepped out of the boat and, hand in hand, wandered up the sloping ground. The earth smelt moist and sweet after the storm, a gentle breeze stirred the young

branches of elms and ash and caused their leaves to rustle with a soft sound like the whisperings of fairies.

High on the upland they paused and turned to look back on the stately castle where they had learnt so much sorrow and found such perfect happiness. And while they stood gazing the citron of the sky turned to amber, and then to rose, and the amethyst-coloured clouds changed to streaks of fire. The tiny diamond window panes in the castle glistened like so many rubies, and one by one the bird-notes rose heavenwards in a mighty chorus of praise.

Epilogue

We know that tempers ran high and rancours bitter during the many years that were to come; but Barbara's marriage to Jim Fiennes was not the only instance of an entirely happy union between people of divergent political views. Her three sisters, daughters like herself of Sir Edward Cecil, who was an ardent royalist, had all of them married officers in the Parliamentary armies, and their married lives were entirely happy. We also know that though Squire Brent did prove irreconcilable at first he ultimately relented, for he was godfather to Jim's eldest boy, and when he died Barbara was his universal legatee, and in a codicil executed two years after the publication of the King's letters he appointed Jim Fiennes executor under his will. Whether the true inner history of what he always called Barbara's infatuation for the rebel was ever made known to him it is impossible to say, but there is no doubt that Babs was the love of his life and that her happiness must to a great extent have softened his heart toward the man who was the fount of it.

But he never forgave his friend Saye and Sele nor did he ever set foot inside Broughton Castle after the stately old pile came back into the possession of its owner some few months after the pub-

lication of the King's letters. He could never forget that it was the latter event, actually brought about by Jim Fiennes inside the castle walls, that led directly to the final catastrophe of '49.

THE END